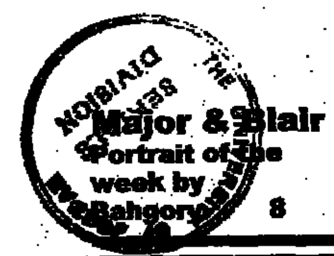
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More seizures

ISRAEL's Defence Ministry has drawn up a $300 million plan to build new roads in the West Bank for Jewish settlers to use in order to avoid Palestinian-ruled areas, the Israeli *Haaretz* newspaper reported, quoting Defence Ministry sources.

AFP reported that the plan would entail wide-scale expropriation of Palestinian lands. Israel began building so-called bypass roads for settlers when it granted autonomy to major West Bank towns in late 1995 under the Oslo Accords. Palestinians protested the building of the roads, saying it necessitated the seizure of hundreds of acres of Arab lands. Furthermore, it isolates Palestinian areas of the West Bank from each other by creating a network of Israeli-controlled roads across the territory. No budgetary approval has yet been granted for the new plan.

More killings

ISRAELI border guards shot a Palestinian man dead yesterday at a West Bank roadblock when they fired at the car he was travelling in. Israeli police said the car had ignored an order to stop. Earlier in the week Israeli soldiers shot dead a stone-throwing youth in a village near Hebron.

Israel announced this week that it would ease the closure imposed on the West Bank and Gaza after a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv last March. A Palestinian official said that by yesterday 15,000 Palestinians had crossed the Erez crossing from Gaza to Israel.

Israel said it would allow 55,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza to enter Israel. But Palestinian Authority officials said that the decision to lift the closure was insufficient to revive the faltering peace process and that there was no guarantee that all 55,000 workers will find employment.

Military links

TURKISH Defence Minister Turhan Tayan met his Israeli counterpart Yitzhak Mordechai in Jerusalem yesterday at the start of a three-day visit which is expected to cement the growing military cooperation between the two states.

In the first visit by a Turkish defence minister to Israel, Tayan will meet with President Ezer Weizman, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister David Levy.

Turkey and Israel boosted their ties to a strategic level last year, signing two pacts on military and defence industry cooperation, despite protests from Arab states.

Dialogue halt

IRAN retaliated yesterday against the European Union's decision to impose limited diplomatic sanctions by deciding to halt all dialogue with the EU on human rights, terrorism, arms control issues and the British writer Salman Rushdie. Iran said it found the continuation of the critical dialogue ineffective and not conducive to the promotion of mutual understanding.

The Iranian move, The Associated Press reported, came a day after the 15 EU nations agreed to sanctions against Iran which bar high-level ministerial meetings and ban Iranian Intelligence officials from travelling to Europe.

INSIDE

Peace in peril

Mubarak has issued a fresh warning that the peace process faces unprecedented dangers that threaten its very continuity. Nevine Khalil reports

President Hosni Mubarak said yesterday that Israel's expansionist policy and its violation of the rights of the Palestinians have brought the Middle East peace process to a "dark and dangerous impasse".

In a May Day speech at a rally organised by the General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions, Mubarak said the "dangers" confronting the peace effort threatened its very continuity and flung the door wide open to potentially "serious consequences."

Mubarak, who began a diplomatic offensive to revive the stalled peace effort by visiting Kuwait and Saudi Arabia last weekend, insisted that a comprehensive settlement should be based on the principle of trading occupied Arab lands for peace.

Mubarak, in a television programme broadcast last Friday, offered to host a four-way summit grouping Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Jordan's King Hussein and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. But he made the offer conditional on Netanyahu's readiness to halt Jewish expansion in occupied Arab land, particularly East Jerusalem.

Mubarak, on his return from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, told reporters he was also ready to organise a mini-Arab summit, grouping Hussein, Arafat and Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad. But, again, he made this conditional on Israel's readiness to take steps to end the crisis. "We want to meet for peace, not to take [negative] decisions," he said.

In his 75 minute Labour Day address, Mubarak said: "Unfortunately, the peace process is confronted by dangers that threaten its very continuity. Although the peace effort faced numerous difficulties and obstacles in the past, the hard times through which it is now passing are unprecedented... threatening its very continuity and flinging the doors wide open to potentially serious consequences."

Mubarak recalled that he had issued repeated warnings that "people will never accept a peace that does not ensure their inalienable rights and their legitimate aspirations... that the violation of agreements will sanction mistrust and augment mutual suspicions."

He said that Israel's attempt to impose a *fait accompli* on the ground wreaked havoc on the principle of "joint responsibility for peace" and its violation of the right of peoples to their holy sites "brought the peace process to a dark and dangerous impasse."

"My objective has been clear and sincere, to avoid the dangers looming on the horizon as a result of the imbalance of interests and rights and the absence of justice... and the lack of commitment to the principle of exchanging land for peace," he said.

Declaring that escalating violence in the Occupied Territories was a direct result of Israel's expansionist policy and its violation of the rights of Muslims and Christians in East Jerusalem, Mubarak said: "This phenomenon should have been avoided because it creates a climate that does not serve the cause of peace and co-existence. Unless wisdom prevails, attempts to impose a *fait accompli* are halted and mutual trust is revived, the dangers will be compounded and the situation will deteriorate because despair, frustration and the mounting sense of injustice... will push matters to a dangerous impasse that is difficult to control."

Equally dangerous, Mubarak said, is the current stalemate on the Syrian-Lebanese track "which is tempting the enemies of peace on both sides to continue their efforts to finish it off and drag the region to a dangerous crossroads."

Declaring that Egypt championed a just and comprehensive peace, Mubarak said "we will maintain our position, defending our true concept of a just and comprehensive peace, resisting the attempts to obstruct it and acting with determination to correct its march."

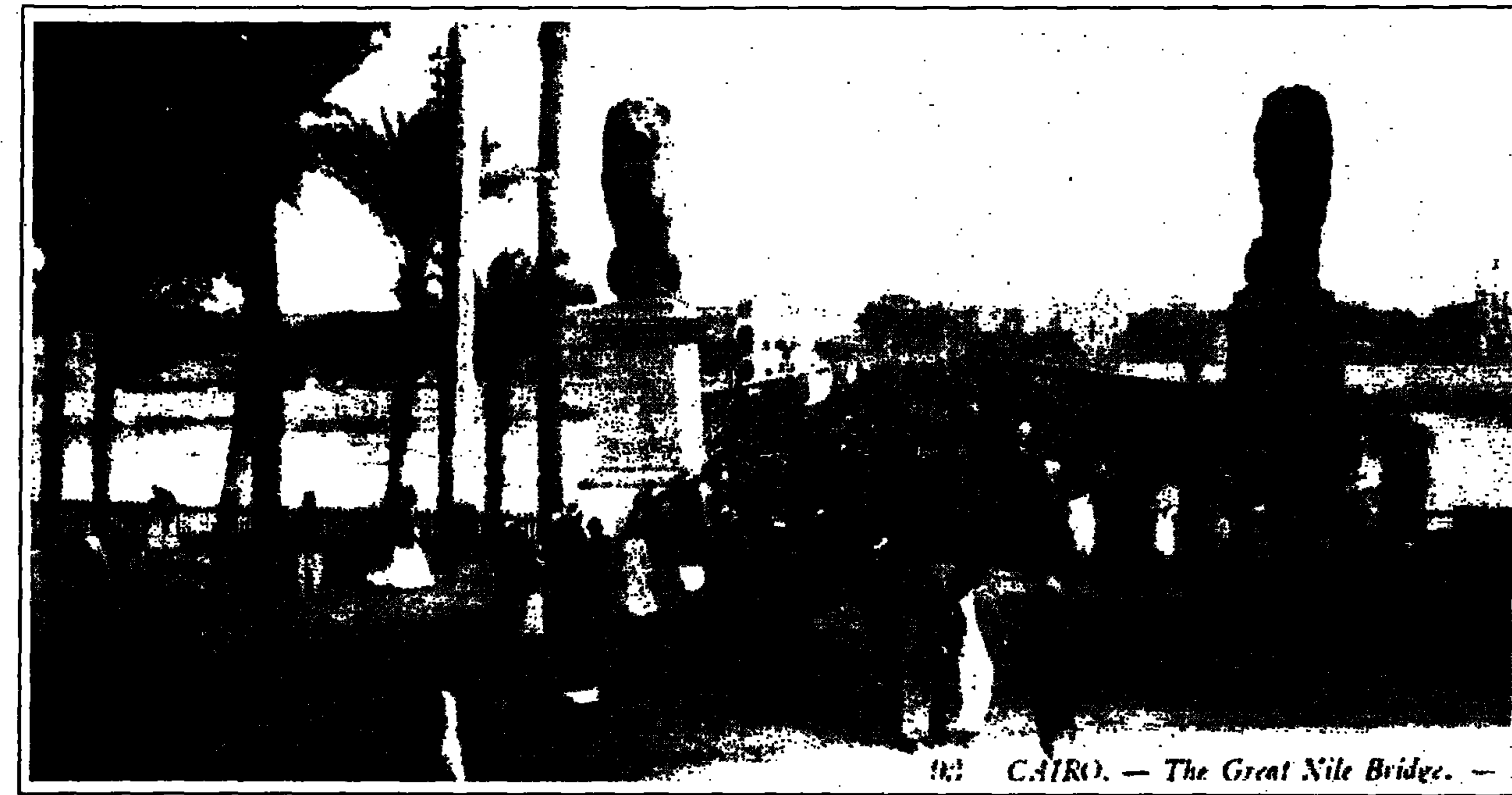
Shifting to domestic policy, Mubarak said that "we are entering a new era, the era of great hopes and giant national projects." These, he explained, include plans to cultivate 500,000 feddans in the Sinai Desert and establish agricultural and industrial communities in the southern section of the Western Desert, which he described as the "southern Delta". The objective is to emerge from the Nile Valley and inhabit 25 percent of Egypt's total area, instead of the present 4 percent.

Lauding the government's economic reform programme, Mubarak said the budget deficit had been reduced to less than one percent and the inflation rate dropped from 22 percent in 1991/92 to 5.7 percent last January.

Foreign debts fell to $28.5 billion, offset by a $19 billion reserve in the Central Bank, he said. The area of cultivated land had increased by 1.6 million feddans and private enterprise is responsible now for 76 percent of industrial production.

Mubarak praised the security forces for "containing the conspiracy of terrorism, which has been reduced to hireling factions working for foreign forces that wish to undermine Egypt's stability and progress."

He added: "In the beginning, they tried without success to export sectarian sedition to a homeland that is proud of its tolerance and national unity. Now they are repeating the attempt, after their criminal scheme went bankrupt, but the Egyptian people, Copts and Muslims alike, are aware of their mean objectives and the scope of their conspiracy. The Copts of Egypt are an integral part of the national fabric, honourable citizens who have the same rights and duties [as Muslims]. Their rights are safeguarded because they are the rights of all Egyptians, partners in a homeland that embraces tolerance..."



LIONS RAMPANT: The lions of Kasr El-Nil Bridge, which must count among Cairo's most handsome landmarks, are being restored to their original glory. Cast in England on the orders of the Khedive Ismail, they have guarded the bridge assiduously, from its opening on 10 February 1872 through its remodelling in 1931, until the present day.
The original structure, pictured here, was commissioned as part of the khedive's grandiose celebrations to mark the opening of the Suez Canal, and for many years was referred to as the Ismaili bridge. Following the revolution of 1952 it was renamed Kasr El-Nil Bridge, owing to its proximity to the Nile side palace that was once home to Princess Nazli Hanem, a daughter of Mohamed Ali Pasha, which occupied the site now filled by the Arab League building and the Nile Hilton. *(see p.2)* *photo: courtesy of Maged Farag*

Zero prospects

As Netanyahu persists in his expansionist policies and America watches with folded arms, a still-born initiative for re-vitalising the peace process was made by an Israeli opposition leader

A senior Arab diplomat in Washington believes that chances of re-vitalising the Middle East peace process are zero. "The current American approach, which is simply to encourage Israel and the Palestinians to resume negotiations, will have negative results," the diplomat said. "What is needed now, and urgently, is a stronger, firmer American approach."

His reading of the situation is apparently shared by senior Israeli foreign ministry officials. David Afek, head of the ministry's political research department, was quoted yesterday on Israeli radio as saying that the peace process was "dead".

"Israel is isolated," he said, "without any partners in the Arab world or among Western states, including the US. The peace process is dead," he continued, "and Israel's international standing continues to slide."

Arab frustration, triggered by Israel's decision to build a Jewish quarter in East Jerusalem, is shared by American officials, although they do not go public with their gloomy assessments. The American effort has been focused to date on what they call security for Israel, or zero terrorism. This suits Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu fine.

"The important thing is that we get security cooperation up and going and then just keep plugging ahead there," said President Bill Clinton in assessing the results of his envoy's last mission in the region. "Dennis Ross helped to broker the meeting between Palestinians and the Israelis on security."

The Arab diplomat said the US has not presented any tangible proposals so far. "There is no initiative, only promises," the diplomat said.

Hanan Ashrawi, minister of higher education in the Palestinian Authority, also said the US had not worked out a "serious initiative... What they presented were broad ideas. We did not see the political will to intervene with Israel or persuade Israel of the error of its ways," Ashrawi told *Al-Ahram Weekly* by telephone from her office in Ramallah.

Ashrawi said the peace process was "undergoing the most serious crisis since it began. I believe that the present Israeli government is extremely detrimental... to stability, security and peace in the region."

Ashrawi said any initiative "has to start from one base, holding Israel accountable, dealing firmly with Israel. I feel this is a real test of the US role, to be able to maintain the integrity of the process, to bring all parties to comply with agreements and to remove the causes of deterioration."

But the Clinton administration does not appear to be ready for any confrontation with Netanyahu's government, if only for purely domestic reasons. Clinton's entanglement in the White Water affair means it "is not the time for picking a fight with Israel", according to one political analyst.

A former American diplomat told the *Weekly* the fact that both Clinton and Netanyahu are facing domestic political problems makes the prospects of any meaningful peace moves unlikely.

"Right now, the emphasis is on managing the crisis, keeping it under the lid," an administration official said.

On the official public position, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns told the *Weekly*: "We are hopeful that the Palestinians and Israelis, now that they have resumed their security cooperation, can move on and resume their political talks."

Burns stressed that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will not visit the Middle East until such a visit has a chance of reaping positive results. "We need the Arabs and the Israelis to stand up and to decide that they're going to resume their peace negotiations," he said.

Albright has invited Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy to meet with her in Washington to review "American and Israeli positions on the peace process". Officially, the meeting is to lay the groundwork for any future visit to the region by Ross. Unofficially, the fact that the invitation was addressed to Levy, and not Netanyahu, is being read in Jerusalem as a calculated snub against the Israeli prime minister.

"Initially," Burns said, "we had hoped [they could meet] early in May but the secretary of state is going to be in Moscow on 2 May and will be in Central America next week...so we're looking for a mutually convenient date."

Israeli sources say the Clinton administration is "disappointed" with the lack of progress in the peace process following Ross's visit two weeks ago. In Washington, Albright is expected to make it clear to Levy that she will only authorise Ross to return if there is a "formula" for renewing negotiations. Without this — wrote commentator Nehama Duek in the Israeli daily, *Yediot Aharonot* — Albright may threaten to reduce America's involvement in the Oslo process, warning both Israel and the Palestinians that its foreign policy efforts will be expended elsewhere.

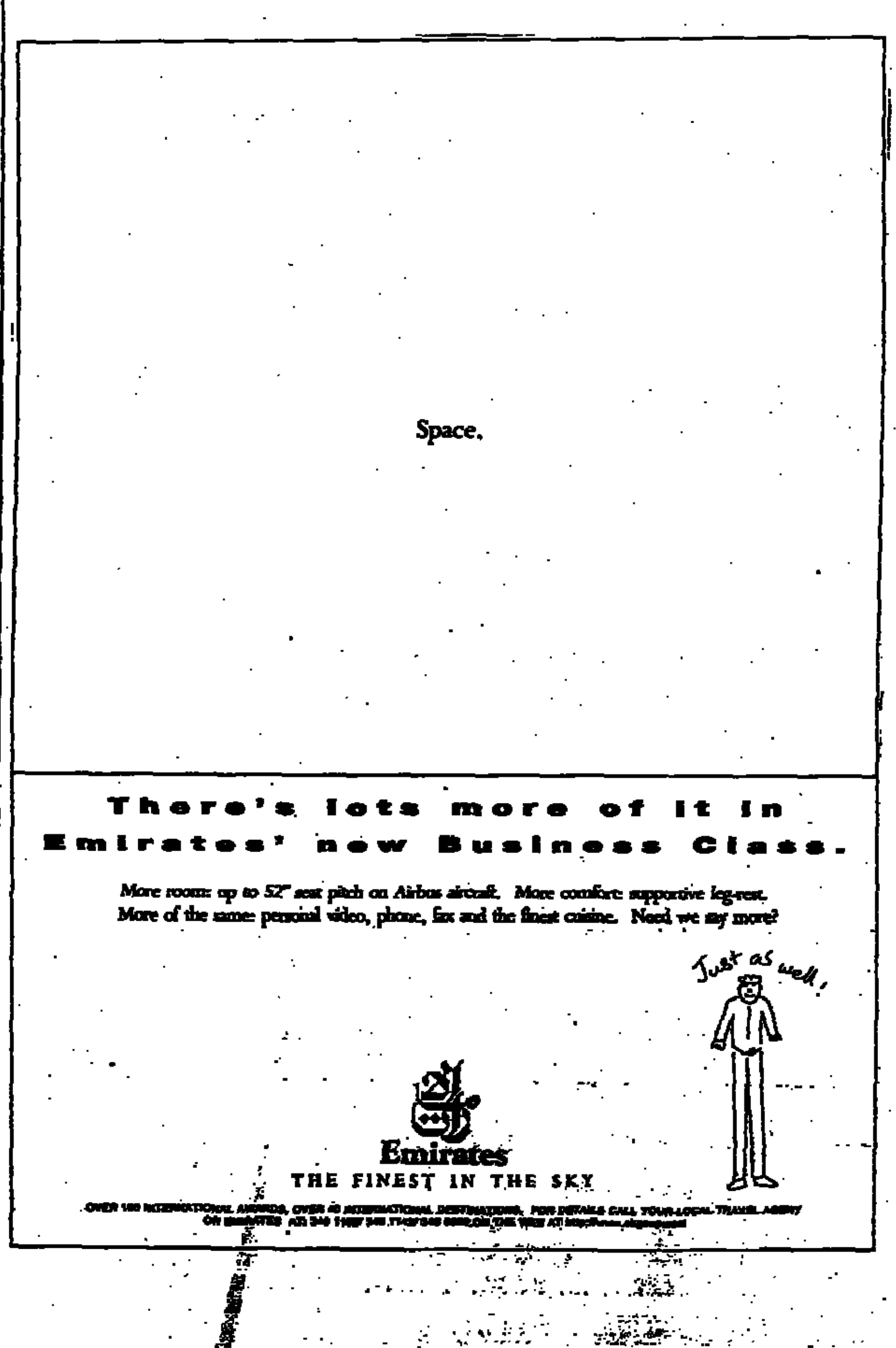
It is unclear what "formula", if any, the Americans have in mind. The only new proposals, touted by Yossi Beilin, Israel's Oslo architect and a Labour member of the Knesset, appear to be more in line with the European initiative rather than the American position.

Beilin met with Yasser Arafat in Jericho on Sunday and won his endorsement for a new initiative to revive negotiations. According to Israeli press reports, Beilin's initiative includes an Israeli undertaking to cease building settlements in the Occupied Territories and a commitment by both parties to "prevent violence and terrorism". The Palestinians would accept the first West Bank redeployment decided by the Israeli cabinet in March in return for negotiations over the scale of the second redeployment scheduled for September. Concurrent with these commitments, negotiations on final status issues would commence.

PLO sources said Arafat accepted the initiative but was "utterly pessimistic" that it would lead anywhere. "It's just an attempt by the Labour Party to help resolve the crisis," he said. "Nothing can be taken seriously unless it comes from the Israeli government."

It is a view shared by the Likud government, which lambasted Beilin for his efforts at "duplicating" Israel's foreign policy. "The sooner Arafat realises that a government has been elected in Israel, and only it is authorised to negotiate, the better-off the political process will be," ran a statement from the prime minister's office on Monday.

Hoda Tawfik in Washington; Graham Usher in Jerusalem; Sherine Bahaa in Cairo





Opposition rally slams Israel and US

Nearly 5,000 people chanted anti-Israeli and anti-American slogans during a rally organised by opposition parties to show solidarity with Palestinian rights to holy Jerusalem. Khaled Dawoud was there

Opposition parties repeated their demands for freezing all relations with Israel and went a step further by targeting the country they held responsible for backing Israel's "intransigent" policies — *the United* States — at a rally in Cairo last Thursday. Representatives of opposition forces from across the political spectrum, ranging from the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood to the Egyptian Communist Party, lambasted Washington for its Israeli "bias" and called for a boycott of American, as well as Israeli, goods.

Around 5,000 people gathered at the Cairo headquarters of the Wafd Party and chanted slogans against Israel, the United States and the peace agreements that Israel signed with Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians. Diaeddin Dawoud, leader of the Democratic Nasserist Party, went so far as to call for a collective Arab war against Israel.

"Breaking off diplomatic relations and closing down embassies will not restore Jerusalem," Dawoud told the rally. "Regaining Jerusalem and liberating Palestine are possible only through the unity of Arab armies."

In order to show that the majority of Egyptians were united in opposing Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's policies, particularly his decision to build a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem, opposition parties invited heads of profes12Q3al syndicates, trade unions, artists and writers associations to address the rally.

The rally was also attended by a representative of the ruling National Democrat*ic Party (NDP), Mohamed Abdellah*, chairman of the parliament's Foreign Relations Committee, in a rare appearance by an NDP official in an opposition-sponsored event. Abdellah's speech was interrupted, however, by Nasserist and Islamist hecklers who chanted anti-government and anti-Camp David slogans. The Camp David peace agreements were signed by Egypt and Israel in 1978, providing a framework for the peace treaty concluded the following year.

Mohamed Sobeih, the Palestinian representative at the Arab League, was also forced to cut short his speech after several people angrily accused Yasser Arafat of making too many concessions to Israel, mainly by signing the 1993 Oslo peace accords.

The Wafdist organisers made great efforts to keep the rally under control, ordering a group of young enthusiasts, who were shouting slogans supporting the Islamist resistance movement Hamas as well as suicide attacks against Israel, to keep quiet.

According to analysts, the fact the rally was hosted by the Wafd, known for its liberal position and its support for a "special" relationship with the United States, was aimed at conveying to Washington and Israel the message that the majority of Egyptians, including those counted as "friends," were unhappy with US policy and its Israe*li "bias."*

"We reject the American position which aims at satisfying five million Jews at the expense of the interests of millions of Arabs and Muslims worldwide," said Fouad Serageddin, the Wafd's 82-year-old leader. "If the United States is counting on its [military] might, it should know that God is mightier."

Serageddin urged the establishment of an Arab/Islamic fund to provide support to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and their new Intifada against the Israeli army.

All speakers who addressed the rally, with the exception of the NDP's Abdellah, repeated the opposition's demand for breaking off diplomatic ties with Israel and putting on ice all types of other relations, whether official or non-official.

Abdellah said Egypt was steadfast in supporting the rights of the Palestinians and would continue with the "struggle" until the Palestinians established an independent state, with Jerusalem as its capital. Abdellah added that the large turn-out at the rally and the presence of representatives of nearly all segments of Egyptian society was proof that the Palestinian question was a national issue related to Egypt's own security.



Thousands gather at Al-Wafd headquarters during last week's anti-Israel rally *(photo: Ayman Ibrahim)*

Rifaat El-Said, secretary-general of the leftist Tagammu Party, lashed out at the United States for using its veto power twice at the UN Security Council to block the passage of a resolution that urged Israel to refrain from building the Jewish quarter in East Jerusalem.

"America is using its veto power to protect the Zionist aggression. Putting the blame on Washington is no longer adequate," El-Said said. He urged all Egyptians to send cables to the US Embassy in Cairo, condemning the "blind support and bias" for Israel and making it clear that this threatened the good relations between the Arabs and Americans as well as their joint interests.

Adel Abdel-Gawad, head of the Brotherhood-dominated professors' association at Cairo University, urged the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, which was represented at the rally, to stage a one-day boycott of American airliners and ships to protest the US support for Israel.

The Brotherhood's spokesman, Maamoun El-Hodeibi, said the Palestinian cause was not only a matter of concern to Palestinians but to all Arabs, Muslims and Christians. He called for greater support to the Palestinian struggle to maintain a strong presence in Arab East Jerusalem in face of Israeli attempts to Judaise the holy city.

A four-page statement issued at the end of the meeting was read out by the Wafd's deputy chairman, No'man Gomaa. The statement urged the Egyptian government to freeze all agreements signed with Israel, ban Egyptians from travelling there and recall the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv for "consultations." It also urged all Arab countries to revive the boycott of Israel and "reconsider" their relations with the United States in order to show the American administration that its anti-Arab policy could harm its vital interests in the region.

OIC official 'very pessimistic'

The new secretary-general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, who visited Cairo last week, is pessimistic about the prospects of regional peace. He spoke to Dina Ezzat

The deadlock in the peace process and the Arab-Islamic effort to save Jerusalem figured high on the agenda of Ezzeddin Al-Iraqi, the new secretary-general of the Orgal1iΣtion of the Islamic Conference (OIC), during a visit to Cairo last week. Al-Iraqi, who met with President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, also discussed the situation in the Palestinian self-rule areas.

Al-Iraqi, a former Moroccan prime minister, became OIC secretary-general in January. His visit was part of a regional tour, designed to strengthen the role of the 54-member organisation.

Before his consultations in Cairo, Al-Iraqi *paid a brief visit to the self-rule areas in* Gaza and the West Bank city of Jericho, where he met with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. "When I sought the wise and valuable guidance of President Hosni Mubarak, who has always played an instrumental role in the peace process, I briefed him on the very sad situation in the Palestinian Authority territories," Al-Iraqi said.

"The Israelis are building settlements to isolate the various spots of the very small area of land that they are giving back to the Palestinians," he said. "It seems they are stifling the Palestinians in cages and denying them all basic human rights."

Al-Iraqi discussed proposed initiatives for breaking the stalemate in the peace process with both Arafat and Egyptian officials. However, based on what he saw on the ground and heard from senior officials in Jericho and Cairo, the OIC secretary-general said he was "pessimistic, as a matter of fact very pessimistic, about the future of the peace process."

He added: "It does not seem that the Israelis want to honour any of their commitments. They keep cheating all the way, every step of the way. Not only that, but they want us to turn a blind eye to their cheating and overlook what they are doing to the Pal*estinians there, which is impossible.*" Israel, he complained, "has the full and unconditional support of one important side [the United States], and this side encourages it to do what it is doing."

What he had seen in the self-rule territories was "shocking," and he recommended that "leaders of all the Arab and Islamic states should visit the self-rule areas and see for themselves."

According to a source at the Foreign Ministry, the secretary-general was issuing this call because Arafat was "trapped" and looking for support, if only moral support, from all possible sides.

At an extraordinary meeting of the OIC in Islamabad in March, Arafat had warned that the peace process was on the verge of collapse and appealed to Muslim leaders worldwide to "rescue" Jerusalem. The conference urged OIC member-states to freeze their relations with Israel in a show of condemnation of its expansionist policy in the Occupied Territories, including Jerusalem.

"If the Israelis think that by building these settlements, they are going to impose a fait accompli, then they are mistaken," Al-Iraqi commented.

The Foreign Ministry source said that Egypt hopes the OIC will begin to play a *more effective role in promoting the Arab* position in the peace process among the non-Arab members of the Islamic organisation.

The OIC is officially committed to Jerusalem. Its charter states that the organisation's headquarters should be in Jerusalem — although its main offices are currently in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah. The organisation also has a special Jerusalem committee, headed by King Hassan of Morocco. This committee met in Rabat last month to discuss ways of dealing with the Israeli decision to build a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem. It also urged member-states to freeze relations with Israel.

However, critics argue that recommendations made by the OIC are rarely implemented by its members. Al-Iraqi responded by insisting that "member-states have a moral commitment to honour recommendations made by the OIC."

During the tour, which began in the self-rule territories and ended in Jordan, Al-Iraqi discussed preparations for the next regular OIC summit, scheduled for December in Tehran. He said that differences between the Iranian regime and some Islamic states — which accuse Tehran of exporting its Islamic revolution — would not prevent the summit being held as scheduled and attended by high-ranking representatives of all 54 member states.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa commented that Al-Iraqi's visit to Cairo had been "aimed at coordinating positions." Mohamed Ezzeddin, the minister's assistant for OIC affairs, added: "This visit was very important for Egypt. All the Arab League members are also members of the OIC. Furthermore, the OIC has member-states that are also members of the Organisation of African Unity. Therefore, the OIC is an excellent channel for the coordination of positions."

Undermined development

Land mines in the Sinai and Western deserts threaten both human life and economic development. But the costs of their removal are huge. Gamal Essam El-Din investigates government efforts to secure foreign assistance

The National Security Committee of the People's Assembly has held a number of sessions during the past few weeks on the problem of land mines littering the Western and Sinai deserts, and the negative impact of the mines on development plans for these two regions. By highlighting the *problem, the committee is seeking* to attract world attention and win assistance for the expensive process of mine removal. Fathi Qozman, the committee's chairman, revealed that the estimated cost of clearing the mines has climbed to over $200 million.

The mines in the Sinai Desert are left over from Egyptian-Israeli wars. Those in the northern section of the Western Desert have been there since World War II, most of them left from the battle *of El-Alamein.*

Qozman described the mine problem as a "new savage war that is posing a major threat to development plans for the Sinai and the North-Western deserts." The problem has assumed even greater proportions since the government's switch to a free market economy. "At a time when the government is selling off public assets and reducing the deficit in the national budget, the land mines represent a burden on financial resources and budgetary allocations," he said.

Maj. Gen. Fouad Galal, assistant to the minister of defence, said that as many as 22.7 million mines litter 288,000 hectares in the Sinai and Western deserts. The majority are in the northern section of the Western Desert, where an area of 262,405 hectares is thought to contain around 17.2 million mines. In the Sinai Peninsula, around 5.5 million mines are buried in an area of 25,595 hectares.

As well as threatening development plans, the mines are a constant danger to local inhabitants, Galal said, adding that they have already killed 690 people and left as many as 7,611 others injured.

While the mine problem in the Sinai is "limited" and documented by the Defence Ministry, the dangers assume dramatic and tragic proportions in the North-Western Desert because maps and clearing equipment are lacking, Galal explained.

Although some European countries have provided Egypt with financial and technical assistance, according to Galal, this aid is by no means adequate. Britain provided 500,000 pounds sterling to finance the purchase of 50 mine-detectors and Italy sponsored the training of 20 army officers for 13 weeks in 1994. But Germany has refused to provide assistance, although its forces were mainly responsible for planting the mines in the North-Western Desert, he said.

"The German refusal is not due to a lack of interest in helping to solve the problem, but to the fact that the German constitution prohibits military assistance to foreign countries," Galal explained. "As a result, we are now seeking an economic contribution for clearing the area for development projects, and Germany has responded positively."

While Germany has provided Egypt with maps and documents about the mined area in the North-Western Desert, Egypt remains in dire need of mechanical, thermal and laser photographing equipment, he said.

Omar Abu-Steit, an MP for the southern Governorate of Sohag, inquired about possible cooperation between Egypt and the United Nations in dealing with the problem. Galal responded that the UN initially put the number of mines in Egypt at a paltry 6,000. But Egypt was able later to provide the UN with maps and documents showing that one fifth of the world's existing land mines, estimated at 110 million, are in Egypt. "As a result, it was stated at a UN conference on the elimination of conventional weapons, held in Geneva in 1996, that there were as many as 22.7 million mines in Egypt. This should put us at the forefront of countries eligible for financial assistance."

At the conclusion of the debate, Qozman made it clear that Egypt needs sophisticated mine-clearing equipment rather than foreign experts in the field. "The Egyptian army demonstrated its great mine-clearing capability during the Gulf War," he said.

Lions treated from acid treatment

New techniques and materials are being used to clean up the bronze lions that guard the entrance and exit of Qasr El-Nil Bridge. Reem Leila reports

Faced by a press outcry against the use of sulphuric acid to clean the four bronze lions on Qasr El-Nil Bridge, the Ministry of Culture has assigned new restoration experts to remedy the damage that has been done. The cleaning process came under fire immediately after it began last month when it became known that thinner and sulphuric acid were being used to remove pollutants which have built up on the statues. The type of thinner used was condemned for being greasy with bad effect on the statues and sulphuric acid was said to have removed not only the pollutants but also the patina layer covering the bodies of the two lions. But now that "correct" techniques and materials are being used, officials are optimistic that the refurbished statues, currently covered by heavy cloth, will be revealed to the public again by 15 May.

The first phase in the new clean-up process is the use of an ammonia-and-water solution to remove a four-millimetre layer of dust and rust, said Hossameddin Abdel-Hamid, a restoration professor at Cairo University's Faculty of Antiquities. Then, *a mixture of organic solvents, such as mor*pholine and carbon tetra chloride, is applied by soft brushes and cotton to remove the layers of paint. "The new technique has produced good results because it does not have the slightest effect on the patina layer," Abdel-Hamid said.

In a second phase, called the "fixation process," silicon dissolved in other fluids will be used to strengthen any weak points in the bodies of the statues, said Ahmed Radi, supervisor of a restoration centre at the Ministry of *Culture. Certain resins* may also be added, said Reda Abdallah, another restorer at the Faculty of Antiquities.

In a third "protection" phase, a layer of silicon will be applied to cover the bodies of the four statues, thus warding off pollutants. Silicon, Abdel-Hamid said, is not only locally available but also can be removed easily if additional restoration work is needed in the future. The statues' maintenance should take place every 3 months.

The lost patina of the two lions facing Tahrir Square will be restored by mixing certain chemicals to regain the original colour. Denying that the original patina was green, Abdel-Hamid said the new patina will be various shades of brown. "Degrees of brown are much better due to their warmth and suitability to the oriental medium," he said.

A varnish will be applied to prevent the statues from shining which, Abdel-Hamid said, is "offensive" to the eyes of the public.

Although the new techniques are said to have produced good results, they were crit*icised by Radi, who argued that foreign* restoration experts should have been brought in to do the work.

"We should have resorted to foreign experts in this field because they have more experience," Radi said. "The methods used at present will give us a 95 per cent result but the restoration work on such statues should be 100 per cent successful, if not more."

Radi, who specialises in the restoration of paintings and not statues, said the or*ganic solvents that are being used* "are not that effective. There are other materials which could have been used," he said, without going into specifics.

But restorer Abdallah disagreed. "The materials being used are the only safe and effective ones," he said, "and the plan that is being carried out is technically the most correct."

Abdel-Hamid, though happy with the restoration work, said the attitude of the public worried him. The four statues are not far from the ground and are within reach of anybody who wishes to climb on top of them. This is why, he said, he was urging *the government to post guards on the* bridge to protect the statues.

Spy trial opens

The trial of Azam Azam, an Arab-Israeli accused of spying for the Mossad, and Emad Ismail, an Egyptian alleged to be his accomplice, opened last week amidst tight security. Khaled Dawoud reports

Armoured vehicles, police in full riot gear and dozens of other law enforcement agents took up positions outside the Cairo Court of Appeals in the downtown Bab El-Khalq district early last Thursday morning — a sure sign that an important trial was about to begin. Inside, the court was packed with people when Azam Azam, an Israeli national of Arab-Druze origin, and Emad Ismail, an Egyptian, were brought in — handcuffed — to face trial on charges of spying for Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service. Two Israeli women of Arab-Druze origin, were also put on trial in absentia on similar charges.

The case against the four has caused widespread controversy since news of it broke nearly six months ago, just about the time the Third Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference (MENA III) opened on 12 November.

The case against Azam, in particular, quickly assumed political overtones because his arrest coincided with the slump in Egyptian-Israeli relations that followed the rise to power of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Israeli officials who attended the MENA conference claimed that Azam was not a spy. They attempted to turn his case into a human rights issue, levelling accusations against the Egyptian government and demanding his immediate and unconditional release.

Top Israeli visitors, including Netanyahu himself, Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and members of the former Labour government, all urged President Mubarak to release Azam without trial.

But President Hosni Mubarak insisted that the case be turned over to the judiciary for trial.

The first people to arrive in the courtroom were Azam's relatives — 20 of them, according to his brother, Sami — Israeli Embassy diplomats and Asad El-Asad, a Druze leader and former member of the Israeli parliament. Journalists were searched twice before they were allowed into the courtroom.

Azam and Ismail were then brought in, handcuffed, and put into a small wire-mesh dock. Azam shouted "I am innocent" to the assembled journalists as photographers and cameramen went into action. Ismail became hysterical and screamed: "This case is a fake."

Ismail was forced to sit down by police officers, while Azam's relatives held a mobile phone close to him on the other side of the wire. Although unable to hold it himself, he managed to shout a few sentences in Hebrew into the receiver.

Azam also spoke in Hebrew to a number of Israeli journalists who attended the trial, and repeatedly told reporters in Arabic that he had nothing to do with Israeli intelligence.

Shortly after the opening of the trial, a prosecutor read out the charges against Azam and Ismail, who both worked in an Israeli textile factory in Egypt, one of the few fruits of the "cold peace" between the two countries.

According to the indictment sheet, Ismail went to Israel in March 1996 to receive training, along with 20 other workers, in operating the factory's machines. While there, Ismail was introduced by Azam to two Israeli women: Zahra Greis Youssef and Mona Ahmed Shawahneh.

According to prosecutors, the two women were charged by Israeli intelligence to recruit Ismail as a spy, mainly to collect information *about the new industrial cities in Egypt and their factories.* In return, the women gave him sex and money. According to prosecutors, Ismail received $650 from Shawahneh, who also promised him a monthly salary of $1,000.

Azam was charged with acting as a link between Ismail and the two women. Prosecutors said Azam provided Ismail with women's clothes, including underwear, which, when soaked, produced a secret ink that could be used for sending letters to the two women or to Israeli intelligence.

There had been widespread speculation about who would agree to defend Azam at a time when Egyptian-Israeli relations had reached a very low ebb. The name remained unknown up until the first day of the trial. Then, after repeated calls by the presiding judge, Moharam Darwish, for Azam's lawyer to present himself, Farid El-Dib, a prom*inent defence lawyer, finally made his way into the courtroom.*

Ismail's lawyer failed to appear, forcing the court to recess. El-Dib was then immediately surrounded by Egyptian journalists and lawyers, who blasted him for agreeing to defend Azam. "How much were you paid by the Israeli Embassy?" shouted one lawyer. El-Dib replied that he was being paid by Azam's family.

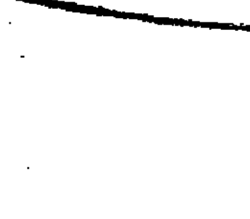
In an opening presentation, El-Dib argued that the main evidence presented in the case — women's underwear that produces secret ink — was "thin." In this high-tech age, he told the court, secret ink is no longer used for spying correspondence. "They use satellites now," he said.

El-Dib later told reporters that even if the charges against Azam were true, they did not amount to more than industrial espionage, which is punishable by a maximum of 15 years imprisonment.

Ismail's lawyer, Ahmed Mahmoud Bakr, made an appearance in the courtroom after the presiding judge had already postponed hearings until 18 May. He said he was deliberately late because he was not yet ready to make a presentation. He told reporters that he had been hired by Ismail's family only a few days earlier and had not yet had the chance to meet with his client. However, he had put in an appearance in court in order "to refute claims in the Israeli media that there were no Egyptian lawyers ready to defend those involved in the case."

Both El-Dib and Bakr said they had accepted the case because the defendants were innocent until proven guilty. El-Dib said that Egyptian law stipulated that every defendant must have a lawyer. "So, even if I had not accepted the case, the court would have appointed another lawyer." But fellow lawyers rejected El-Dib's argument, insisting that he should not have agreed to defend Azam.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



Yemeni poll fought with tapes

Yemen's first parliamentary elections since the civil war were unorthodox in methods, unsurprising in results. Karim El-Gawhari reports from Sanaa



In Sanaa, Islah supporters cheer as they wait for the results of the Yemeni parliamentary elections *(photo AP)*

Three years after the civil war, Yemen's parliamentary elections held few surprises. As of press time, the *ruling* General People's Congress (GPC) was headed for a landslide victory over its coalition partner and main rival, the Islamist Islah Party. The socialists, who came third in the last elections four years ago, boycotted the elections, claiming that they would only legitimise the results of the civil war.

With more than half *the seats at* stake counted, the GPC won a whooping 115 seats, ceding only 24 seats to Islah and 28 to independents and minor parties.

Fears of widespread violence proved unfounded. In the days before the elections, the government appealed to the Yemenis to leave all weapons at home. To make sure that the request was heeded, the army set up checkpoints at the entrances of all cities to search for weapons.

Still some violent incidents were reported. In the southern province of Abyan, a soldier opened fire on an election committee. Shoot-outs were reported in the Northern town of Dhamar. A total of 11 people were killed on election day, last Sunday. Interior Minister Hussein Mohamed Arab says these incidents were not related to the elections.

Voter turnout in the south was of a particular significance. The Socialists have traditionally been the strongest party in the south, especially in the port of Aden. But despite their boycott, the turnout was not below average.

Hisham Bashrahil, editor of the independent Aden weekly *Al-Ayam*, believes that the normal turnout was partly due to the fact that soldiers were allowed to vote where they were stationed and that many of the soldiers stationed in the south are *from the north*. After the civil war, whole units of the southern army were disbanded and replaced by northern soldiers.

Foreign journalists monitoring the elections in Aden spoke of a large number of military personnel in civilian clothes voting.

"It was the mistake of many people in the south who did not register for the elections, thus enabling the military in the south to have such an impact," Bashrahil said. For him the socialists, excluded from power, "are finished".

"The socialists are a spent force," echoes political analyst Hamud Al-Sulaihi. "They will be no longer seen as the sole representative of the south."

Once the socialists removed themselves from the race, the competition between the GPC and Islah dominated the election process.

The run-up to the elections witnessed a fierce battle between the two coalition partners. In what came to be known as the "war of the tapes," Islah supporters rewrote some traditional Yemeni songs, substituting the lyrics with ones portraying the GPC as un-Islamic and corrupt.

GPC *supporters quickly answered* with their own tape versions against Islah. There was hardly a quiet moment in the Yemeni cities until election day.

Traditional afternoon sessions of *qat*-chewing were also used in the campaign. (*Qat* is a narcotic leaf and its use is widespread and legal in Yemen). One campaigner who made particular use of the *qat* sessions was Ali Mohamed Usrub, a candidate of the ruling GPC in the capital Sanaa. A former interior *minister, Usrub says he participated* in 52 such sessions, at the rate of three to four a day. Speculation about the composition of the future government is afoot. On election day, President Ali Saleh spoke about "a new mechanism" involving the relationship between the GPC and the Islah. Saleh warned the Islahists that their game of keeping one foot in the government and the other in the opposition could not be allowed to continue.

It is unclear what the GPC's new *terms for a renewed coalition with* the Islah will be. But few in Yemen doubt that the Islah will accept nearly any terms presented in order to stay in power. "They would lose credibility, but many of them are extremely ambitious and they want to become ministers," explains Mohamed Abdel-Malik Al-Mutawakil, political scientist at Sanaa University. He predicts future infighting within Islah, a party which consists of two wings: the ideologists represented by the Muslim *Brotherhood, and the political prag*matists including the tribal sheikhs. Analyst Al-Sulaihi predicts that, in case of a party rift, the non-ideologists would win.

How will the new government look? A bit of everything, most likely. "Everyone will cooperate with the government, because the position of the opposition proved to be too weak in these elections," Al-Sulaihi said. This would perfectly fit Ali Saleh's governing style. "Everyone will get an open invitation by *Ali Saleh to participate", he added.* Editor Bashrahil expects a GPC government spiced with independents, moderate Islah representatives and even some socialist technocrats.

Why should militant Islamists, on the eve of Algeria's first parliamentary elections in five years, perpetrate indiscriminate massacres against Algerian civilians? Hisham *Fahim*, ***reporting from Algiers, explores their possible motives, while,*** *Amira Howeidy* ***speaks to Paris-based observers who question the very fact of the massacres***

Terror before the poll

A series of horrifying mass killings brought violence in Algeria last week to a level unprecedented since the armed confrontation between Islamist groups and the military-backed regime began five years ago

In the worst incident of the week, 93 civilians, including 43 women, children and old people were murdered in the village of Bougara, 20 km south of the capital Algiers. The victims had their throats slit, were killed with machetes or burnt to death. The government claims that had the security forces not intervened and killed some of the attackers, the village population would have been wiped out. A day later, 42 people were murdered in another vil*lage, Medea, 60km south of Algiers.*

Even though no one has claimed responsibility for the latest massacres that sent shock waves throughout Algeria, the authorities are blaming armed Islamist groups.

Observers are bewildered in their attempt to find a political motive for the mass murders. The latest massacres were characterised by the random killing of unusually large numbers of innocent victims rather than selected figures. Hence, some observers believe that the attackers aim to instill terror in the Algerian citizens and discourage them from participating in the legislative elections scheduled for 5 June.

The escalation in violence coincides with the approach of elections from which most Islamist parties are excluded. Exceptions are the Movement for the Society of Peace (formerly Hamas) and Al-Nahda which are close to the government. A low turnout at the polls would chip away at the credibility of the electoral process which would, in turn, impede the authorities' attempt to imbue the institutions in power with legitimacy.

Others believe that the brutal killing of citizens hints at the desperation of the leaders of the armed Islamist groups: The forthcoming elections will provide the authorities with legitimate means to combat what the government calls "residual terror", particularly since the escalation in violence has belied the gov*ernment claim that security forces* have contained Islamist terrorism.

This time around, the authorities' attitude has been different from their response to the wave of killings that took place during the month of Ramadan earlier in the year and claimed around 400 lives. This time, the government called for greater vigilance by the population to combat the attackers. The government, which encouraged the organisation of villagers' self-defence groups, appears to be counting on an anti-Islamist backlash from the population, fed up after five years of relentless violence.

The presidential elections of November 1995 and the referendum on amending the constitution in November 1996 took place peacefully. The violent operations have not deterred a large number of Algerians from exercising their right to vote on the country's political future. However, both the presidential poll and the referendum were followed by an upsurge in violence once special security measures were lifted. President Liamine Zeroual has pledged that this time the polls would go ahead amidst tight security and that the security measures would continue to be enforced after the elections.

Despite this pledge, some observers believe that the turnout at the June elections will determine the extent and scope of violence following the elections. The impending elections are a litmus test of the voters' confidence in the regime's ability to *ensure security, peace and stability.*

The government hopes that the new party to replace the old ruling National Liberation Front, the National Democratic Rally, will boost the regime's popularity while the participation of pragmatic Islamist parties will compensate for the absence of the outlawed mainstream Islamic Salvation Front.

There is less enthusiasm nowadays in both France and the US for a dialogue with the Islamists. Both countries condemned this month's massacres and, for the first time, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns did not renew his administration's call for a dialogue between the Islamists and the Algerian regime.

...but did it take place?

For the first time since he was appointed Prime Minister last year, Ahmed Ouyehia broke his policy of silence on the escalating state of violence in Algeria. Last week, he directly accused the "terrorist groups" of committing a series of massacres in which at least 350 citizens were killed. In the Algerian political jargon, the term "terrorists groups" has come to refer to the Islamist groups. However, observers and experts interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* say that they find very little evidence to support assertions that such massacres actually took place.

"We are now talking about mass massacres that were perpetrated violently on almost 60 to 70 women and children daily. But the problem is that to this very day, we have not seen any photos or TV reports showing these massacres," said Qosai Saleh Darwish, an Algerian *expert* and *writer* living in Paris. "We haven't seen convincing testimonies from the survivors, either," he told the *Weekly* in a telephone interview.

Darwish pointed to a recent testimony broadcast on state-run Algerian TV a few days ago. A middle aged man recounted the details of one of last week's massacres where more than 70 women and children were allegedly slaughtered. "The man was lying comfortably in bed, his hands clasped together. He spoke with confidence, very coolly as if he had watched a movie, not a bloody, vicious massacre," Darwish explained. You would expect a man who had witnessed the killing of a single child to be visibly shattered, so "what about a man who had seen 70 women and children butchered under his very eyes?" he asked.

Such inconsistencies, said Darwish, make him question whether these massacres really took place. In the past, the question was always whether the Islamists were behind the massacres or not, he said, "but the question posed now is whether they really happened. For my part, I am beginning to doubt it."

After the cancellation of the 1991 parliamentary elections by the Algerian army which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win in the second round, a decree was issued prohibiting the press from publishing any information related to security matters unless it was released officially by security officials.

To François Burgat, a prominent French scholar and expert on Algerian affairs, this six-year-old decree means that all the information on violence one gets from Algeria is sanctioned by the regime. "So, as an observer, the only data I get on the opponents *of the government is that they rape women* and slaughter babies and old men," Burgat told the *Weekly*. "What doesn't fit in this frame of analysis never reaches your ears."

Burgat warned, however, that this does not mean that there is no extremist component in the Islamic movement. "There is no doubt that they have tried to put pressure on the population. But if you make it the unique explanation of violence then you don't get any kind of understanding of what is really happening in Algeria."

According to Darwish, many observers and experts on Algeria believe that some Algerian officials have an interest in the continuation of the state of insurgency. Since the cancellation of the 1990-91 parliamentary elections, more than one president, prime minister and interior minister have came to power and gone "except for the high-ranking security officials and the army generals who have remained in their posts. This is very strange in a country where the number of victims [of political violence] has reached some 100,000 in only five years," said Darwish.

The problem in Algeria, explained Darwish, is that the very same officials who encourage the state of insurgency are also key decision-makers in the regime. "There seems to be no awareness of the strategic interest of the state. Thus, there is a self-destructive mechanism which hasn't stopped operating since the crisis began." There have been no attempts to redress the situation inside the government or to implement political reform to face the crisis and confront the armed groups, explained Darwish.

"This is bound to discredit the regime, the security forces and the statements made by *Algerian officials," he said. "What kind of* security force protects Algeria when every single day we hear of a massacre in which 50 people are killed?" Darwish asked.

As the parliamentary elections draw closer to their scheduled date of 5 June, some observers see a link between the escalation of violence and the forthcoming poll. But many predict that, as happened during previous polls, the volume of violence will drop to zero come election time.

"Isn't it strange that when the 1995 presidential elections and the 1996 public referendum were held we did not hear of killings or massacres?" asked Darwish. He argues that although violence in Algeria does not have a pattern, it becomes predictable at times, such as when the government attempts to implement political reform.

Ominous lessons in teachers strike

Arafat has more to worry about than the stalled peace process with Israel as discontent mounts within his own Fatah movement. **Graham Usher** reports from Jerusalem

Despite an official line that the matter was an "internal Israeli affair", there was little disguising the gloom that descended on the Palestinian Authority (PA) when it became clear that neither Binyamin Netanyahu nor his government would fall as a result the Bar-On corruption scandal. "I expect Netanyahu will try to repair his credibility by escalating measures against Palestinians," said the chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, wearily, on 21 April.

It certainly looks that way. At a meeting of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee on 23 April, a robust Netanyahu said Arafat was "mistaken" if he thought Israel would make "political concessions" (i.e. implement signed agreements) in return for any PA *decision to renew security* cooperation with Israel. The PLO leader's response was that Netanyahu "talks too much".

Away from the vitriol, Arafat's current problem is how to shore up Palestinian constituencies for a peace process that is defunct. On 28 April, he presided over a meeting of the Palestinian National Dialogue Conference in Nablus, with delegates from the PLO's opposition Popular and Democratic Fronts. The Islamist opposition Hamas refused to participate in protest at the continued incarceration of its members in PA prisons. The meeting was the first formal gathering of the Conference since its inauguration in February. The aim, said PLO sources, was to find a "new Palestinian consensus" vis-à-vis the peace process.

A new consensus is sorely needed. In the two months since the crisis over the construction of the Har Homa settlement in Jerusalem erupted, polls have shown a decline in Palestinian support for the peace process from 73 to 60 per cent and a corresponding rise in support for armed resistance from 21 to 40 per cent.

More ominously for Arafat, the discontent is not confined to the Islamist opposition. It includes elements of his own Fatah movement and entire sectors of Palestinian society, constituencies which, if they become mutinous, would strike at the core of the PA's legitimacy and governance.

In February, some 19,000 teachers working in West Bank PA schools went on strike for a 200 per cent wage increase and smaller class sizes (the PA pupil population in the West Bank in 800,000). The imperative driving the dispute was economic. PA teachers earn between $300-500 a month compared to the $700-900 teachers earn working in UNRWA schools, the UN Agency responsible for the education on Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories. Teachers in Israeli public schools earn an average of $1,500 a month.

But there was also a political dimension. After the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections in January 1996, the PA's Education Minister, Yasser Amr, promised public sector teachers pay increases and said that their civic rights would be protected by a new PA civil servants' law, replacing existing Jordanian laws in the West Bank which among other things prohibit the right to strike. Fifteen months on, neither pledge has been honoured.

Aware that the teachers dispute could quickly spread to other public employees such as doctors and the police, some of whom earn as little as $250 per month, Arafat held a meeting with the Teachers Higher Coordinating Committee (THCC) — a grassroots group which emerged after the February strike — on 18 April. Calling the organisation "illegal", he denounced the teachers for sacrificing the future of Palestinian children and offered them a 10 per cent salary increase. The teachers walked out.

Four days later, 25 THCC members were picked up in arrest sweeps by the PA's Preventive Society Force (PSF) on charges of "abuse of power". Palestinian police surrounded schools to prevent any "forcible eviction of students from classes", while the PA's Education Ministry sent letters to striking teachers warning they would face dismissal if there was no return to work. PSF West Bank Commander, Jibril Rajoub, hinted darkly that the strike had been instigated by "opposition Palestinian elements" receiving their orders from Damascus and Amman, a line echoed persistently by the PA-controlled Voice of Palestine radio station.

If these strong-arm tactics were intended to bludgeon the teachers into submission, they failed. In a massive show of public support, protest marches, led by teachers but joined by parents, Palestinian NGOs and representatives from the West Bank's private sector schools, were held in Hebron, Bethlehem and Nablus.

At a sit-down strike outside the Education Ministry in Ramallah on 24 April, PLC speaker, Ahmed Qrei, said all 88 members of the PLC supported the teachers' demands. West Bank Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti told the protesters that it was "unacceptable for security forces to get involved with union issues" since Palestinians "have laws, courts and civic institutions". Fatah in the West Bank also issued a statement warning the PA that should the detained teachers not be released "protests would escalate" — a threat underscored by the fact that the largest faction behind the THCC is neither Hamas nor the PLO opposition, but Fatah.

Having overreached himself, Rajoub — along with Ramallah's District Governor, Moustafa Liftawi, and PA police chief, Haj Ismail Jaber — met again with the THCC. In return for the release of detained teachers and the *setting up of* a ministerial committee to look into their grievances, the THCC agreed to suspend the strike.

By 27 April all 25 teachers had been released and most West Bank schools were functioning normally. But the mood after Arafat's and Rajoub's interventions was best expressed in a poll conducted among PA teachers last week. It showed 86 per cent of teachers in favour of continuing the strike and 14 per cent in favour of deferring it until the next academic year.

Behind the media myth

Misleading media coverage of events in Zaire has led to a confused understanding of recent developments. Gamal Nkrumah examines the real issues facing the country

Watching international televised coverage of the crisis in Zaire, one could be excused for thinking that the rapid advances of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) look less like a forward march than a disorderly retreat. And the revolutionary has metamorphosed into the reactionary. Why the disinformation campaign? Why are viewers supposed to look eastwards to the jungles south of Kisangani which the ADFL overran three weeks ago, instead of looking westwards — towards the Zairean capital Kinshasa?

The ADFL overran Matadi — which is the sole supplier of Kinshasa's electricity. Matadi lies 350 kilometres west of Kinshasa and it is Zaire's main port and the last major city, apart from Kinshasa, not already taken by the ADFL.

The sad truth is that the international media is very often employed as an instrument not of re-examination and education about world situations, but of sensationalism, self-delusion and self-justification. In the telecasts' fervent yearning to be sympathetic to poor Africans they bend over backwards and come dangerously close to utterly confusing the issues. President Mobutu is presumed to be the bad guy — the media kept telling us so. Now, rebel leader Laurent Kabila is reputed to be a nasty and untrustworthy character. As viewers, we're supposed to shrug our shoulders and say, "They are so mixed up and wretched out in Africa. They never get their act together. The West will have to intervene and restore order at some stage."

These may seem like odd questions to pose. But why are 2,500 American, Belgian and French troops stationed in the Congolese capital Brazzaville? Why do the staff of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and *Medecins sans Frontières* or Doctors Without Borders (MSF) feel uneasy about the popular uprising in Zaire? Why are the relief agencies suspending humanitarian relief operations *in eastern Zaire following* reported attacks by the ADFL? Why are ADFL troops preventing aid workers from helping Rwandan refugees and thus provoking another refugee exodus?

Earlier this week, President Mobutu *declined to go to South Africa* to meet with Kabila. Mobutu's son told South African President Nelson Mandela that his ailing father is too sick to travel. Why is the very sick Mobutu hanging on so tenaciously to power? He is Africa's richest man after all — *reputedly with a fortune* of more than $4 billion. Why is Mobutu refusing to step down even as the ADFL closes in on the Zairean capital Kinshasa? He could easily afford to live happily ever after in one of his many mansions in Belgium, France, Switzerland or the United States. Why doesn't Mobutu hand over the reins of power to ADFL leader Kabila? Is it because Mobutu is hoping to draw Western powers into the war with the ADFL? Will the West intervene in Zaire?

Can the international media hoodwink the world by its dramatised *pitying of the plight of the poor refugees*?

Nobody knows quite what is going on in Zaire. So by way of explaining the situation, let me pose a few more questions. Why is France now offering visas for 30 of Mobutu's family members while it is throwing out thousands of African and Arab immigrants? Is it because Mobutu's kith and kin are rich and the immigrants are poor? Why on earth is Morocco offering political asylum to 300 of Mobutu's hangers-on, when thousands of Africans have been deported and refused visas because of AIDS scares?

Some puritanical streak in many Westerners insists that the UN-sponsored peace talks in South Africa must not be sidestepped by the rapid advances on the battleground. That is very difficult to swallow in Africa — Uganda, Rwanda, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Angola trod the ADFL's blood-drenched path. Political power was won by the barrel of the gun. The sterilised and clinical efficiency of a so-called 'orderly transition' leaves most poor Africans cold.

The telecasts are misleading. Last week, the telecasts accused the ADFL of hampering international relief work in the vast territories they control in eastern, central and southern Zaire — the ADFL now controls *three-quarters of Zaire*. "We are not blocking anything," protested ADFL Information Minister Raphael Ghenda in Zaire's second largest city Lubumbashi.

Last Wednesday, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan sent a strongly *worded message ordering the ADFL* to allow aid workers to assist the Rwandan refugees still sheltering in the jungles of eastern Zaire. Humanitarian organisations claim that 50,000 of the Rwandan refugees have fled the Kasese Camp south of *Kisangani, Zaire's third largest city*. The refugees are said to be among some 100,000 people camped in the vicinity of Kisangani.

But who are these refugees that are the object of the humanitarian relief agencies and UN agencies? The like*ly killers of 500,000 ethnic Tutsi* Rwandans in 1994 mingle among the mainly ethnic Hutu Rwandan *refugees in eastern Zaire. The governments* of Rwanda and Uganda have definite evidence that the murderers are using the remaining refugees as human shields. The ADFL agrees with the Ugandans and Rwandans. But the UN Security *Council condemned the ADFL as directly* responsible for a potential humanitarian catastrophe.

There was a poignant historical irony in the decision last week by the UN to condemn Kabila for the fate of the killers. Genocide in Rwanda is *for Africa what the holocaust was* for Europe. Had the murderers got their way, a people — the *Intore*, or Chosen Ones, as the Tutsi call themselves — would have been wiped away from the face of the earth. The butchers must never escape justice.

Why doesn't the international media focus instead on the dealings the Anglo-American Corporation had with Mobutu and is trying to have with Kabila today? And De Beers Consolidated Mines, too. Are multinationals trying to buy their way out of their scandalous past collaboration with the regime of Mobutu Sese Seku? Former Zairean Premier Leon Kengo Wa Dongo was made a scapegoat for the country's ills and the government's military setbacks. Wa Dongo was accused of absconding with millions of dollars.

But the real issue is that foreign mining concerns are counting the costs *of a Kabila take-over. They are cautiously* trying to eradicate the lingering evidence of their collaboration with Mobutu.

Much of the unfinished business — the most lucrative deals — has been left to the end. Many suspect *that the war in Zaire has been about* more than democracy, social justice and human rights — it is about Zaire's future role as an African economic powerhouse. Last week America Mineral Fields signed a deal with the ADFL leader to process *waste deposits rich in copper* and cobalt, to rehabilitate a zinc mine and to explore for nickel, vanadium and uranium and other minerals in the southern Zairean province of Shaba, formerly Katanga.

How much was taken? From which accounts? When? Kabila has not raised these questions yet. We do not know if he will. But the most pertinent questions in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Mbuji-Mayi, Johannesburg, London, Paris, Brussels, Zurich and New York are not how much has been stolen from the state coffers in Zaire, but what deals are going to be signed shortly between mining corporations and the ADFL.

"The victors in the final battle for the Congo's emancipation will spring from the blood of Lumumba," wrote Kwame Nkrumah 25 years ago. The late Ghanaian leader *urged "the removal of all mercenaries* from the Congo so as to end the reign of terror established by foreign interests in that part of the continent. Through the guerrilla camps deep in the forests may well emerge some of the new leadership *which Africa so badly needs.*" Nkrumah was Lumumba's friend and backer.

Kabila emerged from the forest camps. Ex-premier Tshisekedi, lest we forget, was Mobutu's hatchetman or "justice commissar". It was *Tshisekedi who signed the arrest* warrant for Patrice Lumumba, Zaire's legendary first prime minister, who was assassinated in 1961.

Many in Zaire doubt the democratic credentials of Tshisekedi's tribally-based Union for Democracy and Social Progress. Washington wants Kabila to share power with Tshesikedi. But, the two Zairean leaders distrust each other's intentions. Barely a month ago, Tshesikedi flew to the French Riviera to receive the ailing President Mobutu's blessings. Mobutu's public rebuff was Tshisekedi's worst public humiliation. Kabila cannot work with Tshisekedi, for Kabila is Lumumba's political heir. Zaire's history of betrayal must not be permitted to repeat itself.



A Rwandan refugee in one of the camps in eastern Zaire where unidentified gunmen wounded her son (photo: AFP)

Exit friendly tyrant

As Zaire's Mobutu joins a long and illustrious line of defunct 'friendly' fascists, Eqbal Ahmad examines the West's democratic pretensions

It looks like Mr Mobutu Sese Seko will finally make an exit from the Congo, a country which for three decades he held hostage to his insatiable greed, to which he gave a new name — Zaire — as masters do to slaves and owners to their estates, and of which he treated the populace like serfs.

Opposition forces led by Laurent Kabila have captured most of the vast country's economic and strategic strongholds, and now surround Kinshasa, Congo's capital. In a *supremely ironic gesture the White House press* secretary told reporters on 10 April that "Mobutuism is about to become a creature of history." A day earlier, Prime Minister Alain Juppé of France, another benefactor and beneficiary of the friendly African tyrant, had called him " a tired dictator."

From 1960 onwards when the American CIA drew the trail in Lumumba's blood from Kinshasa to Washington, Mobutu's fate was sealed as a collaborator. He shall live the plush life and die a lonely death if he is fortunate enough to escape being dragged down the streets by the people he betrayed and plundered. In a poem that is still remembered for its angry power Sahir Ludhyanvi wrote prophetically at the time of Lumumba's murder. The evocative cadence of the Urdu original is impossible to capture. So here is a gist of his opening lines:

Oppression is a mere excess, it shall compound before it fades.
Blood, defiant and innocent, shall congeal where you shed.

The blood you have locked up in your slaughter house
will sneak out one day and you will see it
as fire and stones in the streets
on sharp thirsty swords and flying steel
on bodies of victims guilty and innocent

Power is usually oblivious to the poetry of life. *In 1963*, two years before he staged the coup d'état that would virtually enslave the Congolese for three decades, the self-promoted 'General' Mobutu was honoured by a visit to Camelot, the Kennedy White House. John F Kennedy wrote Adam Hochschild in a recent *New Yorker* article "gave him a United States Air Force plane for his personal use and a crew to fly it for him." The CIA, of which he was once a paid local agent, helped manoeuvre him into power. Washington *gave him over a billion dollars in aid*, and *assisted him in eliminating* actual and potential opponents. President Ronald Reagan hosted him several times and praised him as a "voice of good sense and good will". George Bush greeted him on an official visit as "one of our most valued friends." So he was! Aided by Africa's most voracious kleptocracy, American and French mining corporations fleeced billions out of hapless Congo on extraordinary concessional terms. Mobutu's regime also served Cold War purposes such as aiding *the anti-communist forces of Roberto Holden and Jonas Savimbi in Angola*.

For 32 years the tyrant visited every conceivable cruelty upon Congo's people. Name an extreme human rights violation — assassination, extra-judicial execution, massacre of unarmed civilians, banishment, or torture — Mobutu's Israeli, American and French-trained goons committed them on grand scale. During all of those decades of Congolese torment, the government of the United States and to a lesser extent France pretended to be champions of *human rights. To deflect some of the embarrassment* of its patronage of the notorious thief and his terror, Washington eventually let Israel, its 'strategic ally', do the dirty work of training Mobutu's terrorists. It was not until April 1997 that a White House spokesman, John McCurry, pronounced the farewell message — "Bye-bye Mobutu" — which the Congolese people had so desperately wanted to hear for so long.

By then those were superfluous words. Washington's creature and client *was already a spent force. Mobutu was inexorably* exiting the Congo. If he is lucky he will escape to Villa del Mare, the pink and white marble chateau of gold-plated bathrooms he built on the French Riviera. The Congolese government will surely try to retrieve the billions of dollars Mobutu and his family has stolen and stacked away abroad, and as surely the enlightened democracies of the United States and Europe will do as little to return their stolen wealth to the people of Congo as they did to return their robbed assets to Cuba, Iran and Nicaragua. They are busy nevertheless trying to insure a 'democratic' transition in Congo and prevent a bloody capture of Kinshasa which is what has tarried Laurent Kabila's forces outside the capital.

In many ways, the story of the Congo presents a mirror of our time. You see in it the reflection of imperialism and enlightenment, colonialism and post-colonialism, a constant mingling of democracy with dictatorship, the deep and frightening contrast between principle and practice. The well-known story of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde may not have been meant by its author to be a metaphor for modern imperialism. But it could have been.

From its cruder early days which witnessed Christopher Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas and Cortes's destruction of the Aztec civilization, this monster system has been prone to producing sharp, often brutal, contrasts between the normative and the real. Its posturing has been humane and behaviour quite beastly. The rhetoric of '*la mission civilizatrice*' served as a smoke screen for barbaric pursuits. Thus an estimated half of Algeria's people perished during the country's colonisation by France (1830-1870). The 'white man's burden' was unloaded — i.e. when the 'cargo' survived the shackled torments of the high seas — on to the slave markets of the West. The Americans' 'manifest destiny' caused a virtual genocide of the Indians of North America.

Leopold II, King of the Belgians preceded Mobutu as the grand robber of Congo. In the process of colonising it at the end of the 19th century, Belgium's constitutional monarchy inflicted extraordinary sufferings upon the land and the people of whom millions perished. How many? Adam Hochschild cites Jan Vansina of the University of Wisconsin and one of the world's leading ethnographers of Central Africa as estimating that "between 1880 and 1920 the territory that was then the Congo and is now Zaire suffered a net loss of 10 million people, fully one-half of its population." Yet, barely three decades apart from the horrors of World War II, the Congolese have never figured in the holocaust discourse of the West.

It is a tribute to humanity's quest for the good that while resisting Mr Hyde the world's brutally colonised majority remained attracted to the Dr Jekyll side of Western civilisation. Thus it was precisely around the time when Belgium was engaged in the inhumane enterprise of brutalizing the Congo that Iranian constitutionalists emulated its democratic model when they adopted Iran's first constitution in 1905. The spirit of emulation rarely excluded either a critical comprehension of the Western schizophrenia or a posture of resistance to imperialism. South Asia's nationalists embraced the notion of secularism and parliamentary democracy while insisting that Britain quit India. The constitution of Vietnam — which alone in the 20th century took on and defeated three imperial powers — borrowed from the American Declaration of Independence its stirring assertions of human rights and liberation.

The contradictory strain in the culture of imperialism is not incidental. To the contrary, from the beginning there have existed deep links between liberalism and imperialism. Both have roots in the age of enlightenment. The development of both has been linked to the rise of capitalism. And — a commonly ignored reality — both had a decisive impact on the making of Western democracy.

What is not acknowledged is that imperialism alone made available to key Western countries the resources and safety valves which were essential to the development of democratic systems in the metropolitan countries. In their studies of both democracy and totalitarianism, Western scholars have, by and large, ignored two obvious truths: One is that democracy as we understand it today is a recent development dating from the late 18th century; its growth occurred in the age of industrialism and in the hey-day of European expansion. The second is that democratic ideals grew and came to fruition in imperial politics — Britain, France, the United States, the Netherlands and Belgium. Major centres of *Western civilisation* — Germany and Italy — which were colonial 'have-nots', as Hitler and Mussolini were fond of protesting, ended up as fascist states which imposed wars of 'lebensraum' — living space — upon the imperial haves. A similar undemocratic path was followed by those countries — Spain and Portugal — which had lost their empires by the time they needed it most, when they confronted the challenges of industrialization, ie. of resource accumulation and the need to transfer away the social tensions of rapid social change.

The legacy of imperialism in the Third World is not, as propagandists of the West will have us believe, democracy. It is in fact a dual legacy — democratic and totalitarian. The history of the last 50 years suggests that Western powers have rhetorically extolled the virtues of democracy while promoting totalitarian governments in the Third World. This was true throughout the 1960s, '70s and '80s, and remains partly the fact today. Isolated from their own people and unaccountable to their citizens, Third World dictators have been more sensitive to the needs and demands of their foreign benefactors. Being absolutist, they keep the costs of labour and raw material low. As insecure rulers, they become addicted to expensive arms which they buy in the markets of the West. Their kleptocratic establishments are high flying consumers of luxuries, which along with armaments, are the most value added products of contemporary industrialism.

So with all the rhetoric flowing from Washington, Paris and London the patriarchs remain welcome as long as they do not get into hopeless *trouble* with a rebellious people as did the Shah of Iran, the Brazilian and Argentinean generals, the Chilean Junta, Samosa and Batista. Mobutu Sese Seko shall soon join an illustrious line of friendly fascists. Regrettably, he is not the last. There are others. Need one name names? Their time shall also come to be taken away by the will of people fed up with their excesses and their betrayals. Their patrons too shall call them tired dictators, bid the quick Good-Byes, and proceed with the more pressing task of managing the 'transition to democracy'.

Filling the Congress' vacuum

Gamal Nkrumah interviewed Harkishan Singh Surjeet, leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) of the United Front coalition

What are the prospects of a stable majority government in New Delhi in the near future?

The Congress, which has been ruling at the centre and in most of the states for more than 46 years of the 50 years of independent India, is no more in power. Apart from the loss of power at the centre, out of the 25 Indian states, it rules in only four. The disintegration of the Congress can be gauged from the fact that in the Lok Sabha — lower house of parliament — the Congress has only 142 members in a house of 545.

No single party or a combination of parties who have fought the elections on a common platform have yet emerged to replace the Congress. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing party, has emerged as the single biggest party with 161 members. It is to meet the challenge posed by this reactionary and parochial party which misuses religious appeal that we took the initiative to form the United Front to ward off the danger of these forces. Thus came together 13 parties, both national and regional, who were wedded to secularism. The United Front government was installed in office after the 13-day BJP government was ousted.

This United Front is not based on a clear-cut Leftist and democratic programme. We had to evolve a programme for the front, called the Common Minimum Programme, only after the front was formally formed. This programme includes the demands of the working class and the toiling peasantry, as well as the general democratic demands of the masses *like strengthening* the federal structure; corruption-free administration; strengthening the secular fabric of our society.

However, on economic policies, we had to make certain compromises but we kept our right to dissent and mobilise the people on crucial issues affecting the working class. The United Front government performed well in certain spheres and was *able to win the* goodwill of the people. It was able to successfully conduct elections in Kashmir. It was able to address the issues in the insurgency ridden North-East part of the country, ending the discrimination against states not ruled by the ruling party at the centre and providing more power to the states.

In the realm of foreign affairs, the long-standing problems with Bangladesh were resolved and, apart from improving relations with Russia and China, an agreement with Nepal was reached and an initiative for *talks with Pakistan* was made. Moreover, it did not interfere in the functioning of the investigating agencies pursuing cases of corruption against a host of ex-ministers and politicians mainly belonging to the Congress Party.

On the economic front, however, the government continued to pursue the same old policies of liberalisation under the dictates *of the* IMF and the World Bank. A crisis erupted after the withdrawal of support by the Congress Party. However, the crisis was sorted out and a new leader for the United Front was elected. The Congress resorted to such a move due to internal pulls within the party. The stability of this government will depend on the support of the Congress Party as the United Front on its own does not command a majority. While the days of one-party rule have ended, a coherent combination of parties with a common *understanding* and *programme who will contest* elections together is yet to emerge.

You have been playing a critical mediating role. What have been the most difficult aspects of your task?

The most difficult aspect is with regard to commonality of perception. As I stated earlier, this is not the type of Leftist and democratic front we visualise. We have differences with the Front in the realm of economic policies. We, therefore, have to rely on an electoral alternative consisting of Leftist, democratic and secular parties.

While there are many common things, there are major differences also. To keep this front united it is very necessary to make some compromises and adjustments.

Another handicap is that this government survives on Congress support, a party which lacks credibility in the eyes of the people. While maintaining our independent identity and position we have to work hard to keep the front united. Our concentration, however, has to be against the BJP.

How strong is the 13-party coalition United Front?

We have had no earlier experience of working in such a united front. These 13 parties rule over 10 Indian states whereas the BJP independently rules two states and is a junior partner in two others. The Congress has ministries in four states only.

The fact remains that more than 70 per cent of the voters did not back the BJP. We have to concentrate in rallying these sections, as well as the growing discontent in the Congress Party, *to strengthen the United Front.*

What is the state of the Left in India today?

In terms of electoral strength, it has 53 members in the Lower House of Parliament. It has governments in three states where the Communist Party of India is the leading force, West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, with a combined population of about 100 million. The West Bengal government has been in existence for the last 20 years.

Except for these three states, the Left has very little presence in other state legislatures. It does have strong trade unions, peasant organisations, student, youth and women's organisations spread throughout the country and its role in national politics is very significant today.

It is a consistent fighter against the rightist, reactionary com*munal forces and it vehemently opposes the economic policies* dictated by the IMF and the World Bank.

It has played a key role in the formation of the United Front government. Its voice has to be heard. Its policies and positions are appreciated by wide sections of the population.

How much of a threat does the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) pose to democracy in India?

The BJP poses a serious threat to Indian democracy and the secular fabric of our society. India's [unity] lies in its diversity, with people from different faiths, speaking various languages and having distinct cultures. The population of the minorities is 180 million. It has the largest concentration of Muslims next only to Indonesia. Secularism alone provides the basis for a strong and united India.

The BJP, *with its rabid communal* outlook, aims to knock at these very secular foundations of the republic. Its communal plank has been responsible for various riots that have shaken the country and killed thousands of people. Its ideology goes against the very basis of Indian unity. By utilising the discontent against the Congress Party in states where the Leftist parties and other democratic forces are weak, the BJP has been able to grow. However, this should not be considered as positive backing for the BJP as it consists mainly of anti-Congress votes.

It is to meet this challenge and threat posed by the BJP that we had to take the initiative of forming the United Front.

Is the Congress Party a paper tiger? Must its celebrated historical role be discarded into the dustbin of history?

The Congress Party is disintegrating but it would not be correct to call it a paper tiger. It still enjoys the support of 28 per cent of Indian voters and is the only party that has presence and organisation throughout the country.

The old traditions of the Congress and its role in the freedom movement still appeal to certain sections of the voters. The Leftist, democratic and secular forces have not been able to fill in the vacuum created by the Congress in all parts of the country. In places where they have failed, the BJP has stepped in and has been able to utilise the discontent against the Congress.

What are the most serious problems — social, economic and political — facing India today?

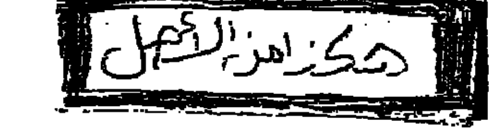
*The policies of [economic] liberalisation have led to in*creasing disparities among the people. While these policies are beneficial to the monopoly houses, multinationals, landlords and the upper sections of peasantry and society it has spelt doom for the working class, agricultural labour and poor peasants. Even vast sections of middle classes and the salaried sections are affected. Small scale industries and medium sized units are facing difficulties and are pulling down their shutters. This is creating and adding to the colossal unemployment figures.

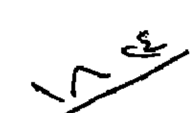
Moreover, the failure to carry out land reforms, combined with the implementation of these policies, is going to lead to unrest. Such a situation can come handy for the rightist forces or can be directed into democratic channels by the democratic and secular forces. This is the biggest challenge facing the *country today*.

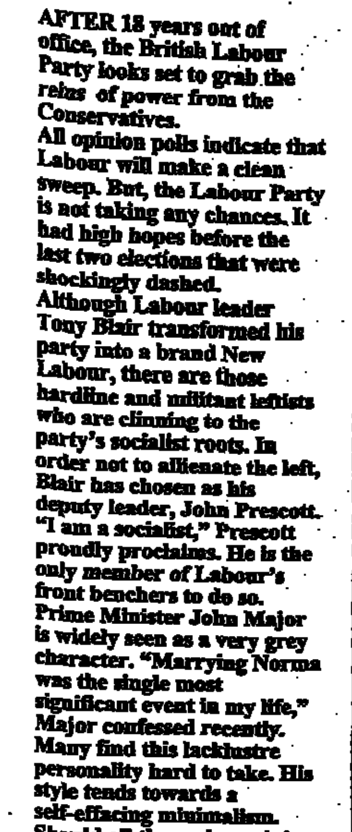
The values cherished by the freedom struggle are eroding and anti-social elements are coming forward. Communal and caste appeal is growing and will ultimately affect the unity of the working class and the toiling millions. There has been no radical change in the social status of women despite 50 years of independence. Regional disparities also are growing and giving rise to separatist tendencies.

With the party which ruled the country for 46 years, the Congress, facing disintegration, we are faced with a big challenge from the BJP. If the Leftist, democratic and secular forces are unable to rally the mass of the people behind them it will be utilised by the BJP.

The struggle between these forces is already on. The formation of the United Front government is part of this struggle. The success *in this struggle, however, depends on the growth* of the Leftist forces which, even though they have a wide political appeal, are not strong enough to mould the political scene in different regions and provinces. This struggle will determine the future course of Indian history. We are making our best efforts to influence events and intervene to [put the country in the] correct direction.







AFTER 18 years out of office, the British Labour Party looks set to grab the reins of power from the Conservatives.
All opinion polls indicate that Labour will make a clean sweep. But, the Labour Party is not taking any chances. It had high hopes before the last two elections that were shockingly dashed.
Although Labour leader Tony Blair transformed his party into a brand New Labour, there are those hardline and militant leftists who are clinning to the party's socialist roots. In order not to alienate the left, Blair has chosen as his deputy leader, John Prescott. "I am a socialist," Prescott proudly proclaims. He is the only member of Labour's front benchers to do so.
Prime Minister John Major is widely seen as a very grey character. "Marrying Norma was the single most significant event in my life," Major confessed recently. Many find this lacklustre personality hard to take. His style tends towards a self-effacing minimalism.
Should all the major opinion polls prove correct today, Major will be leaving Downing Street and the leadership of the party
(photos:AP)





Chirac's calculated gamble

Behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings increased Chirac's chances of pursuing his EU policy without opposition, writes Hosny Abdel-Rehim from Paris

French President Jacques Chirac's dissolution of the National Assembly last week may have been surprising, but it was by no means anomalous. This exceptional measure has previously been resorted to by Charles de Gaulle following the strikes of 1968 and by François Mitterrand when he had to contend with an opposition majority in parliament. But what could have prompted Chirac's action? He was elected only two years ago, the parliament has a right-wing majority and no disruptive event hampers daily life in France.

The real dilemma which prompted Chirac's calling of an early election was his bid to save his conservative coalition and keep France on track for a single European currency. Chirac became president by using a Gaullist rhetoric that has little place either in the contemporary unipolar world nor among liberals. His electoral promises focused on cutting down unemployment but the slogan that won Chirac the elections spoke of confronting the "social fracture".

Once in the Elysées, Chirac had to go back on his promises, compelled as he was to give in to the liberal majority in parliament and to EU demands. Under Maastricht, the signatory states are required to achieve certain economic objectives. For instance, the deficit in the balance of the public budget must not exceed three per cent of the GNP. This requires big budget slashes and a policy of large scale austerity in the social expenditure programme.

The Chirac-Juppé government first started by implementing the necessary reforms of the health service. These spending cuts triggered off the biggest strikes since 1968. Life in Paris became completely paralysed by the public sector employees' strikes in *December 1995. However, the Liberals'* programme required further cuts in the education budget, halting appointments to public sector jobs and extensive reduction of expenditure on the social welfare scheme. Simply stated, it is a comprehensive policy diametrically opposed to Chirac's promises. The result was a daily decrease in Chirac's popularity.

On 16 June, the EU heads of state will meet in Amsterdam to decide on the final stage of the monetary union. In the meantime, further austerity measures must be implemented. This will cause the present government more votes in the course of the coming year and until the natural end of the parliament's session in 1998. Thus would arise the possibility of the opposition winning by a big majority and the coexistence of a socialist government with a right-wing president. The result would be the complete paralysis in the administration of the Fifth Republic. In the past months, many state councillors have talked about introducing constitutional changes to avoid paralysing the state in such an eventuality.

Chirac's attempt over the last two years to strike a balance between his election promises and the Liberals' programme led to the split in the majority and the subsequent departure of Alain Madelin, minister of finance. This was a warning signal of a possible rift between the Liberals and the Gaullists. It is no wonder that meetings subsequently intensified between the sections defeated in the presidential elections and the Liberals. Nor is *it* unpredictable that a new front comprised of Nicholas Sarkozy, François Léotard and Alain Madelin should lead to a split in the leadership during its decisive confrontation with Germany regarding the EU and with the US about NATO.

In recent weeks, intensive consultations with businessmen and executives of big companies took place for the government to gain a better understanding of the country's economic necessities. The former agree on the inevitability of implementing a liberal economic policy involving cuts in public spending and the sale of public sector companies to enable France to join Europe's single currency and compete on the international arena with the US dollar and the Japanese Yen.

Can this be achieved without loss at the polls and a takeover by an opposition government? That was the question Chirac had to put to the majority leaders. Meetings with Balladur's wing were held. Chirac was told that he has to reach an understanding with the Liberals and coalesce with them. Madelin, Sarkozy and Leotard were also consulted in a move to make the public ready to accept the idea of the dissolution of the parliament. Then it was announced that the head of state would address the French nation in a televised speech.

When at 8 o'clock, Chirac appeared on the TV screen he seemed more comical than sensational. He claimed that he needed to know the French people's opinion prior to embarking on an important phase involving strategic options and radical changes. In reality, Chirac was opting to maintain a parliament loyal to himself until the year 2002 to prevent the French people from obstructing the liberalisation policy favouring the EU track. *Holding elections* within a month was seen as a safer course than exposing the country to lengthy debates that would inevitably bring the nation to the polls after the effects of the economic reform policies would have been tangibly felt.

Chirac's decision did not take the opposition by surprise. This did not stop Lionel Jospin, the first *secretary of the Socialist Party, from declaring that* his party was ready to defeat the right-wingers in elections. Nor did it prevent some socialist leaders from warning the people against committing the same errors as during the presidential elections. But the Socialists are divided between their conflicting elephantine party leaders and the bitter heritage of Mitterrand's governing. The Communists, however, according to their secretary-general, announced their readiness to form a coalition with the Socialists over matters concerning the EU, despite the vast political differences between them. The Communist Party is against the unified currency but is committed to a nationalist stance with regard to globalisation.

An electoral agreement has been concluded between the Communists, the Socialists and the Greens for the division of the constituencies. This coalition focuses on the failure of Juppé's government and calls for a Socialist Europe. In the meantime, the far left is preparing to confront the Liberals' reversal by going first to the polls to assess the government's failure and then organising strikes in protest against privatisation and cuts in the social welfare services.

Considering its mounting influence at the polls, the extreme right assessed the "dissolving of parliament" as an electoral gimmick. Chirac took a calculated but not guaranteed risk. He has relied on the fracture in the left opposition and on the mounting fears of the ascendance of the right-wing National Front. Nonetheless, the French citizens' reaction to behind-the-scenes political manoeuvrings and their fear of increased rates of unemployment and poverty may perhaps lead to unexpected results. In all cases, and irrespective of who the winner may be, Jacques Chirac will con*tinue to be president.*

Bosnia's thorny path to peace

Insufficient political will is obstructing the peaceful recovery of Bosnia, the UNHCR spokesman in Sarajevo told Mariz Tadros

"Never again war" urged John Paul II after completing his Bosnian tour last month. Yet Bosnia is stuck in a state of no war-no peace. Just two days after the Pope left, Alija Izetbegovic, chairman of the Joint Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, reminded some 2,000 troops gathered for an army parade that there will be "no forgive and forget" policy for Serbian war criminals. "We cannot and will not forgive them. We will chase them to the end of the world," he said. As Izetbegovic pursues his chasing, thousands of displaced people within the *former* Yugoslavia and thousands more refugees in Europe and Australia are unable to return to their homes.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) had hoped that about half a million displaced people and refugees would have returned by the end of last year. So far, only about 220,000-250,000 have. Kris Janowski, spokesman for the UNHCR in Sarajevo in Bosnia, confessed that the resettlement programme "has not been particularly successful, especially in the return to what we call 'minority areas' because there is very little political will to accept minority returns." He accused "those who started the war" of not respecting the Dayton Accord's humanitarian provisions which have "remained a piece of paper, such as Annex 7 which stipulated that all displaced persons and refugees have the right to return to their homes."

In practice, pointed Janowski, refugees are not able to return — especially to Republika Srpska, the Serb-controlled area of Bosnia — which has simply refused to allow the return of Muslims and Croats. The same is true of the Croat-controlled territories of the Federation. Recently, a Muslim family evicted during the war tried to return to its home in Vrbanja, near Banja Luka in Republika Srpska. Local Serbs shouted abuse at them and attacked their house, forcing the local police to intervene, although such interventions have been rare. Local authorities are notorious for their passivity towards crowd assaults on returning members of a minority.

According to Janowski, some 450,000 displaced people in the Federation and another 400,000 in Republika Srpska are "practically barred from going back to their homes" because their governments discourage them from returning to territories under the authority of a different ethnic group.

"What we [the UNHCR] have simply been trying to do is to build some confidence between the entities. We have established 11 bus lines which *run between the entities for people to go to the* other side and see that they do not necessarily have [devil's] horns. The trips have been successful, thousands of people have been using the buses each week. We have also tried to make assessment visits for people to go back to their homes of origin. These have had a low success rate and have sometimes ended in violence with people being stoned upon arrival. Overall, there simply has not been enough political will for peace," Janowski explained.

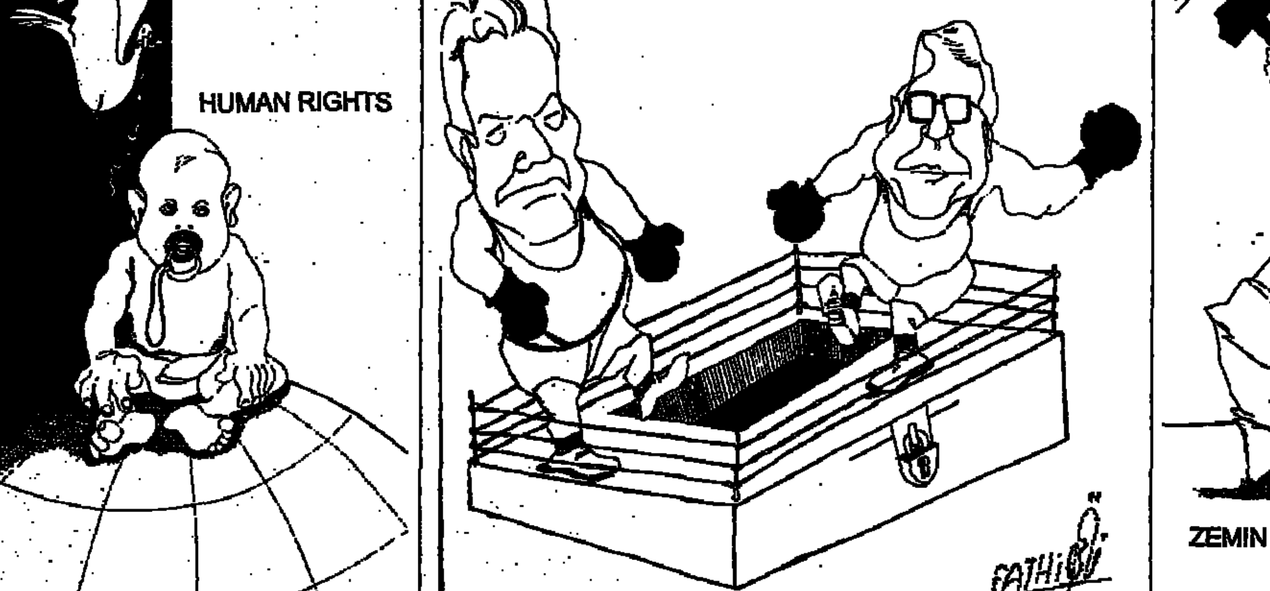
There are an estimated 686,533 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, many of whom have temporary visas in European countries, but they do not wish to return to their home country because of the prevailing state of insecurity and danger. The zone of separation, the former frontline, is essentially a belt of minefields, posing a great risk for those who wish to return to their rural homes. "But the mines are not the main obstacle. The main obstacle is the lack of political will to implement the hu*manitarian provisions of the peace treaty,*" reaffirmed Janowski.

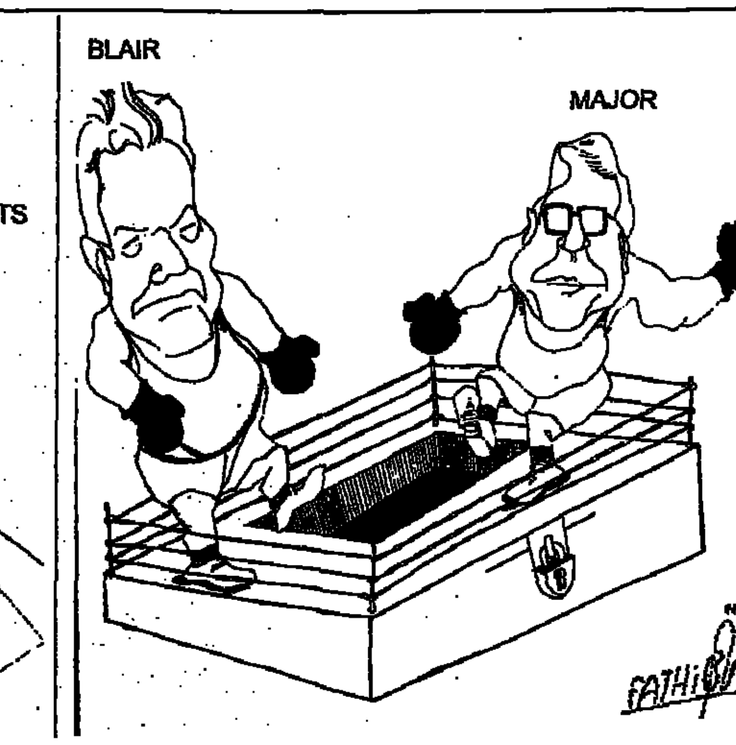
Lingering ethnic hostilities carry a high cost for all three parties. An international aid conference meant to raise more than one billion dollars scheduled for last December in Brussels was postponed for the fourth time because Bosnian party leaders failed to agree on a common economic policy. "They have been squabbling for months on a common currency and a joint central bank. This is blocking vast amounts of humanitarian aid from being channelled through because the World Bank wants to deal with a country which has one central bank, one currency and one accounting system rather than two," added a frustrated Janowski.

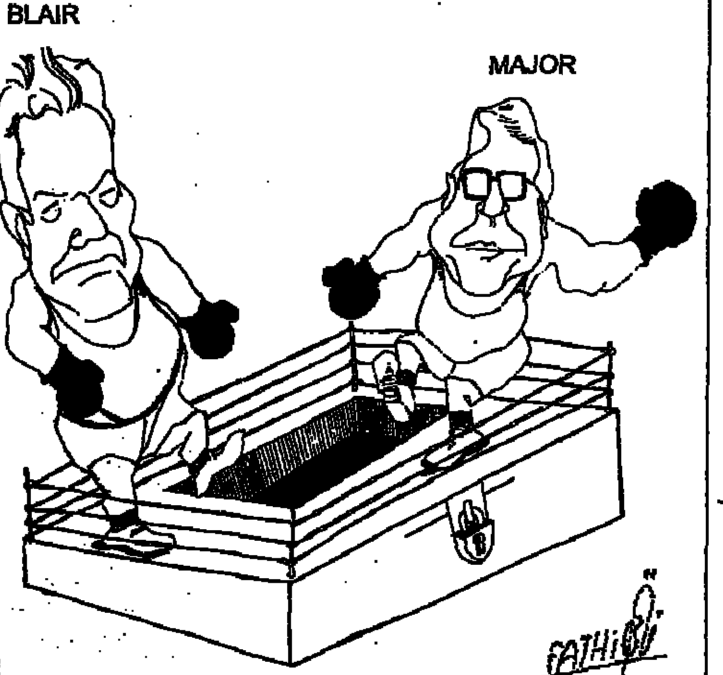
Economic recovery has been slow. The infrastructure is lacking; the roads are destroyed; basic medical facilities are not available for all and schools and houses have yet to be fully restored. Some 24,000 houses have been repaired in Bosnia and some 11,000 apartments in the Sarajevo area, *with plastic sheets being removed and glass window panes once more installed.*

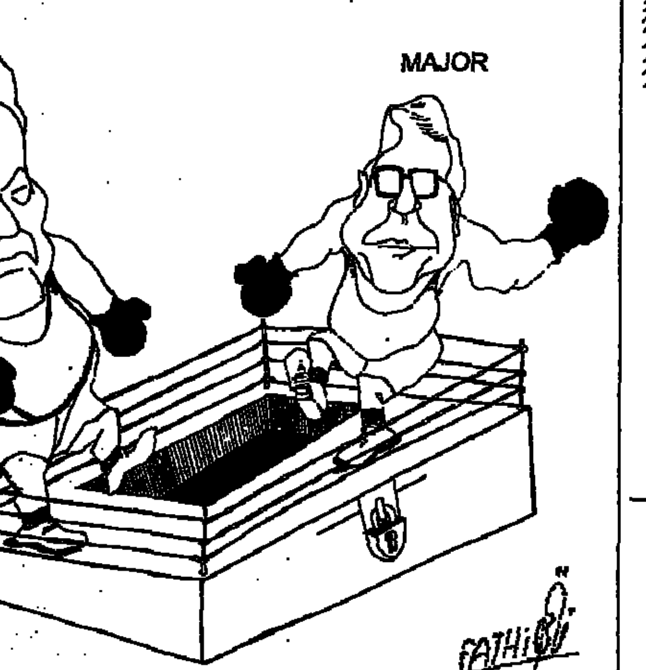
"There has been a lot of businesses in the retail trade and services sector opening up but the industrial sector has not kicked in and that is why the unemployment figure is extremely high," said Janowski. For instance, a steel factory in Gorazde which used to employ 55,000 workers is now working at 10 per cent of its full capacity, while 94,000 people in the city continue to live on humanitarian aid.

"In a way, we are expecting too much too soon. We are expecting the parties to deliver on whatever they signed. A year and a half since the war ended is comparatively a short time. Bosnia needs time for the wounds of war to heal properly," asserted Janowski.









Moscow's eastward drive

The Chinese president's visit to Russia was a resounding success, writes Abdel-Malik Khalil from Moscow

Last week, Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Russia in a determined effort to strengthen relations between the two giant neighbours. The Chinese president was accompanied by his wife, Wang Zhiping, Defence Minister Chi Haotian, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and other senior Chinese officials.

With NATO planning to expand eastward, Russia is also keen on strengthening its relations with its eastern neighbours. Russia is seeking closer ties with Asian countries, especially China, India and Iran. And China and Russia are edging closer politically in an attempt to contain US hegemony in world affairs. Just before the visit of the Chinese president to Moscow, Russian presidential spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky told reporters in Moscow, "Russia and China will state their vision for the formation of a new international order in the 21st century and speak against anyone's attempts to play the role of an absolute *leader in international affairs.*"

Russian President Boris Yeltsin met with his Chinese counterpart in Moscow on 23 April and they were joined by leaders of the predominantly Muslim and Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikstan. There have been tensions between native Turkic-speaking Muslims and *ethnic* Han Chinese in the far western Chinese Xinjiang Province that borders on the Central Asian republics. Muslims in Xinjiang have been calling for the creation of the Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkistan. Beijing has indicated that any notion of secession is absolutely out of the question. China has also ruled out any form of self-government.

In any case, ethnic Han Chinese form a majority of the population in Xinjiang. The Muslims of Xinjiang, like other ethnic minorities in China, enjoy special cultural rights and do not have to abide by the one-child policy imposed on the ethnic Han Chinese majority.

Five days of intensive negotiations, extensive meetings and talks resulted in the signing of a troop reduction agreement between Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikstan.

The former Soviet Union vied with the People's Republic of China for the control of the former Communist world. From the late 1950s to 1989, the Sino-Soviet border, once the longest and most heavily militarised in the world, was the scene of periodic tensions and armed conflicts. However, with the collapse of the USSR and the creation of the independent Central Asian republics, tensions between Moscow and Beijing eased considerably, especially after the 1989 summit meeting between former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and *the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping.*

Two-way trade between the giants rose by 25 per cent in 1996, reaching an unprecedented $7 billion. China is a major importer of Russian arms. Last year, it imported an undisclosed number of Russian SU-27 fighter bombers along with their production technology and batches of S0300 air defence missiles. Moscow hopes to sell Beijing a wide range of sophisticated weaponry including destroyers, light armoured vehicles and tanks. Russia also hopes that China will buy Russian-made civilian aircraft. For its part, Beijing wants Moscow to construct a nuclear power plant in northern China and help it with its space programme.

Russia is China's eighth largest trading partner, accounting for a mere 2.4 per cent of China's foreign trade. There is much potential for an expansion in the volume of trade between the neighbours. China is Russia's third largest trading partner and increasing bilateral trade opportunities would have an important impact on Russia's economic development plans.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

IMF urges tighter money policy

Arvind Subramanian of the IMF speaks to **Aziza Sami** about how donors are expected to perceive Egypt's reform initiatives at next week's Paris donor conference

Government-sponsored structural adjustment and economic reform programmes are beginning to pay off, said an IMF representative in Egypt.

Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly* just days before an Egyptian government delegation is scheduled to head to Paris for talks with leading donor country and organisation officials, Arvind Subramanian, the IMF's representative in Egypt, stated that "Overall, the economy continues to maintain a very sound and robust economic performance as fiscal consolidation continues."

For the Egyptian team headed to Paris for the 6-7 May meeting, which will review the Egyptian economy's performance with particular emphasis on the first quarter of 1997, Subramanian's comments are indicative of how much headway the government has made since it began implementing an IMF-inspired structural adjustment and economic reform programme in 1994.

Over the last three years, macroeconomic indicators have provided evidence that the first steps to reform have already begun yielding results. Inflation, by last February, had declined to 5.4 per cent and the budget deficit dropped to 0.8 per cent of the GDP. Similarly impressive were foreign currency reserves, which reached $19.4 billion, reflecting increasing capital inflows in fiscal year 1996-97. These inflows primarily came from portfolio investments. The significant rise in reserves has enhanced the financing available to the economy which, as a result, has been able to promote investor confidence in the country.

These gains, however, should not be mistaken for the idea that all roads will lead to increased reform. Says Subramanian: "The momentum of reform reached in 1996 needs to be maintained given that the reforms ahead are, at the very least, equally challenging as those undertaken in the past."

The government, he told the *Weekly*, still needs to introduce a package of reforms that will generate more investments and assure the level of efficiency and productivity necessary of sustained economic growth.

"The government recognises that there might be the need to accelerate reforms in some areas, such as the deregulation of the economy and broadening the scope of privatisation," he stated. And for the economy to attract foreign direct investments (FDI), it is important to "develop an environment that shows transparency and legal certainty, embedded in the context of sound macroeconomic performance," added Subramanian. Deregulation is an issue on which the government has focused more attention. The new investment law, already approved by parliament, is a welcome step, he said, but cautioning that there are still some legal obstacles which must be overcome.

It is precisely these kinds of reforms, and impediments to reforms, which will be tackled at the May conference in Paris. With donors representing 25 multilateral and bilateral institutions, the US and other key industrial countries in attendance. While these donors are expected to continue to pledge their financial support and commitment to Egypt's reform initiatives, they will also pay close attention to the discussions on gains that have been realised, as well as those steps yet to be taken.

Working in Egypt's favour are, for example, its success in liberalising the financial sector. Beginning in June 1996, the Egyptian stock market witnessed a tremendous surge in activity, mainly due to the privatisation programme and growing investor confidence in the economy. As new tranches of shares and bonds were floated on the market, the Egyptian capital market came to be seen as "a credible market for generating capital and, therefore, strengthening the financial system," explained Subramanian.

The fact that the market has been able to handle this surge in inflows indicates that as an institution, the stock market is able to cope with a high volume of activity. "From the beginning of January 1997, the rise in prices on the stock market reflected an unnatural exuberance," he said. "But this was corrected in the beginning of February as people began realising that prices could go down as well as up. This happened without strains on the micro-institutional structure, meaning that investors could sell or buy without undue delay."

Though a positive in terms of generating greater economic activity and growth, capital inflows, however, have their down-side. "They can complicate the task of microeconomic management and put domestic financial institutions to the test," said the IMF's representative in Egypt. "They also test these institutions' ability to absorb the inflows and, consequently, put pressure on exchange rates."

"If the exchange rate starts appreciating, it will hurt the competitiveness of the trade sector — especially exports — and could undermine the economy's growth strategy," Subramanian added. "The second challenge is that if the government does not want to allow for the appreciation of the exchange rate, it will have to buy up exchanges." As a precautionary step, the government, he advised, should adopt a tighter fiscal policy to reduce interest rates and sterilise inflows.

Shura debates agricultural exports

Egypt is likely to remain a net food importer for years to come. But when it comes to agriculture, it may have a comparative advantage that will help it reduce its trade deficit. **Gamal Essam El-Din** sits in as the Shura Council debates the issue

With Egypt's economic reform programme now under full-swing, officials and analysts alike expect that investments, a reduced trade deficit and increased productivity are the next likely step. However, while exports have increased over the last 15 years, so too have imports, leaving many wondering how to successfully begin reducing the country's trade deficit. Agriculture in general, and fruits and vegetables, in particular, have been identified as the key. But even this solution is not problem-free.

"Restrictive government policies until the late 1980s, coupled with the collapse of the former Soviet Union and recent political developments in Eastern Europe, have had an inevitable negative impact on the current performance of the Egyptian agricultural export sector," said a report debated this week in the Shura Council.

According to the 92-page report, which was prepared by the Council's Agriculture Committee, while Egyptian agricultural exports rose from a modest LE418 million in 1980 to LE1.6 billion in 1995, agricultural imports sharply increased over the same period, rocketing from LE1.2 billion in 1980 to LE10 billion in 1995.

Compounding matters, the report added, is the fact that total exports are expected to increase to a mere LE2.3 billion while total imports are forecast to top LE11.6 billion in the year 2000. The result, the report stated, is that so far, agriculture's contribution to Egypt's trade deficit has increased from 21 per cent in 1974 to 32 per cent in 1995. In total, Egypt's trade deficit increased from LE1.3 billion in 1980 to LE4.3 billion in 1985, only to increase again, this time to a more alarming level of LE28.2 billion in 1995. By the year 2000, the trade deficit is expected to reach LE34 billion.

Siding with the findings listed in the report were numerous economists and agricultural experts, who argued that there are four main reasons for Egypt's failure to realise its full agricultural export potential — outdated marketing techniques, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and red-tape, an increase in the production of costs of agricultural exports which reduced competitiveness on foreign markets and excessive export dependence on Eastern European markets.

The Council's members, however, cited other factors outside the control of Egyptian exporters and farmers. The Council's prominent businessman member, Mohamed Farid Khamis, referred especially to the fact that Egypt faces restrictions in the European markets that decrease the competitiveness of its agricultural exports.

"I have close ties to the Egyptian Foreign Ministry group charged with negotiating Egypt's trade agreement with the European Union (EU)," began Khamis. "Egypt and the EU had overcome most points of disagreement in areas of industry and financial cooperation. But the main sticking point continues to be over agricultural exports." The main stumbling block for both parties have been the amount of agricultural produce Egypt would be allowed to export to the EU.

"In the area of orange and rice, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry team (led by Ambassador Gamal Bayoumi) was able to secure the same rights granted by the EU to Israel and Morocco in terms of export quantities," continued Khamis. More specifically, Egypt's orange exports to Europe will increase from 7,000 tons to 34,000 tons, "thanks to the efforts of Foreign Minister Amr Moussa during the recent Mediterranean-EU meeting in Malta."



Agricultural exports continue to lag well behind Egypt's food-products import bill

Rice exports, however, have been more problematic. Khamis explained that Holland is the main nay-sayer to any increase of Egyptian rice exports to Europe. "The Dutch import rice from the Antibes to be milled in Holland and re-exported to Europe," he explained. As part of the bilateral agreement with the EU, Egypt is seeking to raise the volume of rice exports to Europe from the current level of 28,000 tons to more than 100,000 tons. Similarly, Egyptian negotiators are also attempting to secure a 60 per cent reduction in customs duties. European duties on Egyptian rice exports currently approximate 300 per cent. The EU, said Khamis, is willing to reduce these duties by only 40 per cent and boosting exports to 32,000 tons.

Egypt has won some concessions from the EU. It will be able to export citrus fruits, such as grapefruits, to Europe until the end of June, thereby placing it on equal footing with Israel in this regard. "We know that we will pay a high price for all these increases when the time comes for reducing tariffs on European agricultural exports to Egypt, but these are the rules of the game," he stated.

But wherever the problem with Egyptian agricultural exports may lie, the report argued that Egypt could easily double its agricultural exports production, especially in the case of fruits and vegetables such as oranges and potatoes. Potato exports, said the report, increased from 120,000 tons in 1985 to 430,000 tons in 1996. In the case of oranges, however, there is still an untapped potential. For example, argued the report, orange exports have declined by 34 per cent in the last ten years, mainly as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a long-time importer of Egyptian oranges.

But with the EU agreeing to the same customs fee levied on orange exports from Egypt, Israel and Morocco, the report noted that the door has been opened for boosting Egyptian orange exports to Europe. These exports, the report said, have already increased to 200,000 tons a year over the last two years.

Also yet to be completely tapped is the country's rice and cotton exports. Rice exports, said the report, climbed to roughly 17,000 tons in early 1997, both as a result of high per feddan yield and an increase in the area cultivated. Egypt ranks first in the world for rice yields per feddan yield.

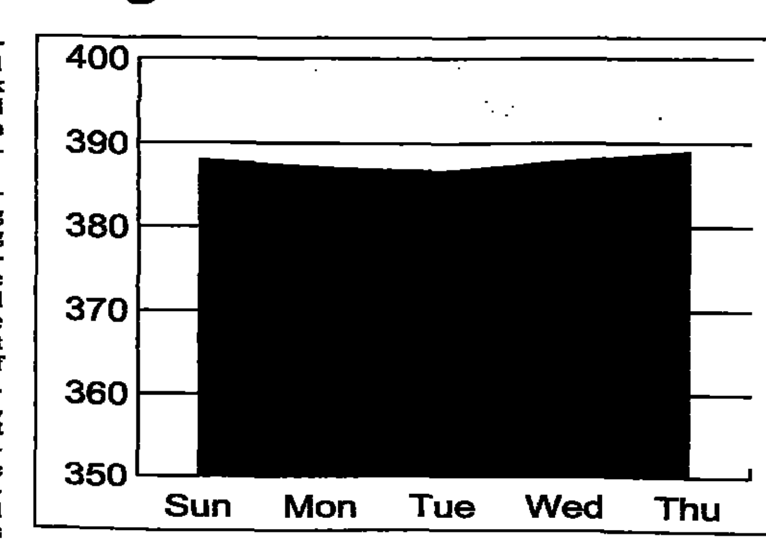
However, nowhere has the decrease in agricultural exports been more acutely felt than in the cotton sector. Cotton exports, said the report, are down by 47 per cent of their mid-1980s level, and make up only 45.5 per cent of Egypt's total agricultural exports due to a drop in cultivated lands of almost 200,000. Despite this drastic reduction, cotton, by far, remains Egypt's most important agricultural export.

"Exports of unprocessed cotton climbed to LE791 million in 1994, while yarn cotton generated close to LE1.3 billion that same year," the report said.

Market report

Smooth sailing for Maritime Bank

THE GENERAL Market Index registered a slight decrease of 0.21 points to close at 389.01 for the week ending 24 April. However, the total market turnover increased to LE33.8.7 million from LE300.9 million the week before.



With the performance of companies on financial sector surpassing those listed on the manufacturing sector, trading shares of the Alexandria Commercial and Maritime Bank led the market in terms of total value of stock traded during the week. Accounting for 13.38 per cent of total trades, LE45.31 million of the company's stock changed hands. The value of the shares, however, dropped by LE29.3 to level off at LE271.6. The Commercial International Bank's (CIB) shares were also heavily traded this week, accounting for 5.82 per cent of total market turnover. The company's stock, however, lost LE0.8 to close at LE85. Also on the financial sector, shares of the Workers Bank of Egypt registered an 8.84 per cent increase in their opening value to close at LE16.

In the manufacturing sector, shares of the Development and Engineering Consultations (DEC), formerly known as the Development and Popular Housing Company, witnessed a 6.12 per cent increase in their opening value to level off at LE38.5. The stock's gain came before the company announced the sale of 10 per cent of its equity, an offer which was over-subscribed by 1.5 times.

But it was the Housing Bonds 96/2011 which registered the greatest gains, their value shooting up from LE62 to LE80.5. On the losing side, shares of the National Spinning and Weaving Company took this week's prize for the greatest decline in share value. Plunging by 17.45 per cent of their opening price, the company's stock closed at LE5.3.

In all, the shares of 51 companies witnessed a gain in value, 23 decreased and 40 remained unchanged.

A dialogue on development

Mohamed El-Erian discusses what to look for in next week's donors meeting on Egypt

On 6-7 May, Egypt will meet with its major donors in Paris. The gathering, known as the Consultative Group (CG), is chaired by the World Bank and attended by high-ranking officials from major donor countries, as well as regional and multilateral financial institutions. It thus offers an important opportunity for Egypt and these financiers to exchange views on economic development issues.

CG meetings are a regular event for a number of developing countries, providing a forum for policy dialogue between governments and donors. The structure of these meetings usually revolves around presentations by government representatives, the World Bank and the IMF. These are followed by interventions by major donors. In the process, all parties are able to exchange views on key development policy issues relating to the economy.

Generally speaking, the CG meetings stress two main points. The first is the recognition that while domestic economic policies and resource mobilisation hold the key to rapid and sustainable economic development, most countries can also benefit from timely and well-focused external financial assistance.

The second is the recognition that the effectiveness of external financial assistance is greatly enhanced when it is coordinated and consistent with the developing country's economic strategy.

The format of the CGs has evolved over time. While development projects remain at the core of the discussions, greater attention has been paid recently to macroeconomic issues and the role of the private sector. We have also witnessed increased attention being devoted to a range of social and governance issues.

The reason for this shift in attention is threefold. First, macroeconomic stability is now recognised as a necessary condition for the general effectiveness of development projects. Second, private capital flows now provide an important source of complementary funding for investment activity in developing countries — indeed with major bilateral donors facing their own budget constraints, private capital flows overwhelm official assistance for many developing countries. Third, an economic development programme cannot be sustained without progress on social issues and good governance.

With this in mind, what, then, can one look for in next week's meeting in Paris, which has been convened at the request of the Egyptian government?

Donors will no doubt listen attentively to the government's presentation on its economic development and its vision for the country's economic future. They are likely to enthusiastically welcome the significant progress realised by Egypt in establishing sound macroeconomic conditions, such as increasing economic growth, declining inflation, strong foreign exchange reserves and a solid budgetary position. They are also likely to be impressed by the increased emphasis on structural adjustment and reforms, coming in the form of privatisation, deregulation, trade liberalisation and financial sector reform. They will encourage the Egyptian government to continue to implement its policy changes as such reforms hold the key to increased investment, faster economic growth and creating more employment opportunities.

Donors are also likely to focus on the non-economic dimensions of Egypt's development challenge, with particular emphasis being placed on social and environmental issues. The government, in this respect, will have to continue to promote its drive to improve the welfare of the poorest segments of the population, as well as strengthening the safety net under those who are most vulnerable to the transitional effects of structural reforms and avoiding undue environmental degradation.

Finally, donors will review the major elements of the government's investment programme, with a view to providing timely financial assistance.

These factors are all important in that they reassert the continued recognition that Egypt, as it moves along the road to economic reform and development, will find willing partners in the ranks of other countries and multinational institutions. The other international partners in the development partnership — private international investors — are themselves responding positively to Egypt's reform efforts. This is clear from the increasing flow of foreign private capital in response to more attractive investment opportunities. Clearly, both the public and private sectors of the international community are willing and able to support the continued implementation of the Egyptian government's home-grown efforts to improve the well-being of its people.

The writer is deputy director of the Middle Eastern Department of the International Monetary Fund. The views expressed are his and do not necessarily reflect those of the IMF.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Humming the same old tune

While the conflict has changed, writes **Lutfi El-Kholi** in the concluding part of his series on the Copenhagen Declaration, those who depart from doctrine are still excommunicated

The Arab-Israeli conflict, like all major conflicts throughout human history, is not an eternal, *immutable phenomenon, the same* now as when it erupted at the end of the 19th century with the first Zionist congress, held in Basel in 1897, or even at the time of the UN partition agreement of 1947 and the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948.

The essence *of the conflict* is connected with what people believe and the forces they are able to rally behind those beliefs. This applies to both sides directly involved: the Arabs, and primarily the Palestinians, on the one hand, and the Jews in Palestine and around the world, on the other. Each of these sides has laid *historical claim to all Palestinian* territory. The arena of conflict has come to comprise the entire Arab world, as a result of bonds of national and cultural identity, or what has been referred to since World War I as the Middle East. The highly strategic value of this region naturally galvanised the international *community* to become a third party in the conflict, drawn as it was by the "genius of geographical location" that spans three continents, the birthplace of the world's three divinely revealed religions and some of mankind's earliest civilisations, or by the enormous quantities of petroleum — some 65 per cent of the world's *known* petroleum reserves — contained in the region.

The international community, however, is not a monolithic entity, and its involvement in the conflict has not always followed a single direction. The orientation of the international community during the period of traditional colonialism, spearheaded primarily by *Great Britain and France*, was not *identical* to the neocolonial period during which the US and the ideologies it represented gained international preeminence. It is true that the West in general, under both old and new colonial systems, has largely supported the Zionist movement and the state of Israel over and against Arab rights, *a bias that still exists to varying degrees in* the West.

But it is also true that this bias has fluctuated at times, depending on the nature of the government in Israel and the extent to which its policies of territorial expansion and the establishment of settlements appeared to *jeopardise Western interests in* the region. At the same time, other powers in the international community generally supported the Arabs. It should be noted, however, that this support was not driven by the same degree of strategic interest or tactical considerations as was Western support for the Jews and Israel.

From 1948 to 1973, the conflict was defined in terms of war, retaining its character of absolute confrontation between two sets of ideological-political premises backed by an organised army on one side, *fedayin* and the Intifada on the other. Israel's objective was to create a "Greater Israel" comprising *the entirety* of Palestine and parts of Jordan and Syria. The Arabs' objective was to "liberate all of Palestine, from the Jordan River to the sea." Not infrequently, these confrontations also changed according to the hues of international conflict and competing international interests, *which were reflected in the politics of the region* as a whole.

Throughout this period, however, neither of the sides directly involved nor any of the international parties were able to resolve the conflict. With the accumulation of events beginning with Egypt's *peace initiative and the conclusion of the Camp David* accords at the end of the '70s, in conjunction with rapidly evolving regional and international developments, two highly significant and unprecedented realities became increasingly clearer to both immediate parties of the conflict as well as to the international *community. The first was that the* two competing absolutist ideologies — "Greater Israel" and "liberated Palestine" — had proved no longer tenable in light of contemporary realities, and that a middle ground, perhaps approximating the UN partition of Palestine, would have to be found. The second was that military confrontation, whether conducted with organised armies or through guerrilla warfare, was no longer viable in light of its exorbitant-costs as well as the growing destructive capacities of the conventional, not to mention the non-conventional, arsenals of both sides of the struggle.

Thus, for the first time in the history of the conflict, as a result of the pressures exerted by regional and international developments in conjunction with the precedent set by the Egyptian-Israeli peace accord, the prospect of "a comprehensive compromise solution to the conflict", to be reached through peaceful means, opened up.

This process was set in motion with the 1991 Madrid conference. This conference established the formula of "land for peace" as the underlying principle for a comprehensive political settlement. The platform was set for an enormously complex and arduous process that would nevertheless give rise to a Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement, mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, the Oslo agreement of 1993 and the creation of a Palestinian National Authority in Gaza and portions of the West Bank from which Israeli troops were to be withdrawn. The stage is set for the creation of a Palestinian state before the end of this century, in spite of continued strains of Israeli intransigence which have begun to lose their credibility among broad sectors of the Israeli public, let alone international public opinion.

It was only natural that a wave of developments signaling a major shift in the course of the Middle East conflict should be accompanied by a wave, commensurate in size, of intellectual, social and political change in the societies of the parties involved: Israel, Palestine and the Arab countries. These changes were manifested by the emergence, to varying degrees within these societies, of what can be termed, in their totality, forces of peace seeking "a just and comprehensive compromise solution" to the conflict, *forces that* stood in *diametrical* opposition to the traditional forces within their respective countries. These traditional forces still sought to revive and fan the flames of the absolutist monolithic confrontation between "Greater Israel" and "liberated Palestine." The debate between these forces has been and re*mains heated.*

The Israeli-Palestinian front, however, is now in a situation that is unprecedented not only in terms of the general course of the conflict, but in terms of the post-Madrid, and particularly the post-Oslo phase. Following the assassination of Rabin by a Jew*ish extremist after his government signed the Oslo Accords*, the forces of absolutist confrontation in Israel managed to assert themselves and gain a platform of expression through the election of Netanyahu in the May 1996 elections and the installation of his Likud-dominated coalition in government.

Meanwhile, following the Oslo Accords, a Palestinian National Authority was established in the territories ceded by the Israeli occupiers. With security apparatuses comprising some 35,000 soldiers, it has set to work building the embryo of an independent nation, an enterprise that has gained the support of the forces of peace inside Israel, who stand opposed to the Likud government's domestic and foreign policies. This situation has given rise to conflict and coexistence within the confines of the same territory between the Israeli government and the Palestinian people, the authorities and the opposition, as periodic eruptions of violence ac*company the fluctuations between progress and deterioration* in the negotiating process. In short, it is a situation of political social crisis that comprises all forces of society without exception.

What are the ramifications of this new situation? An objective reading reveals that a qualitative shift has occurred in the very na*ture and means of conducting the conflict, as well as in the* regional and international climate which governs the diverse orientations of the parties. In other words, despite the legacy bequeathed by the conflict's history, practical experience has combined with the rapid onslaught of new developments and re*alities to effect a profound structural change in the configuration* of the conflict and, per force, a shift in its focus.

For decades, the major fulcrum of the conflict was on the Israeli-Arab border areas, which from 1948 to 1973 had been the focus for periodic military confrontations. But the fulcrum of the conflict began to *shift* from the "Arab-Israeli *exterior*" *to* the "Palestinian-Israeli interior", fraught with domestic socio-political conflict, as early as 1987, with the eruption of the Intifada. The Uprising delivered a specifically worded message to the Palestinians, the Israelis, the Arab people and the international community. *This message read*: a peaceful political settlement has become a possibility; the solution resides in establishing a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, alongside the state of Israel.

The pressures of the Intifada, the cooling of Egyptian-Israeli re*lations*, the withdrawal of the forces of traditional *Zionist* ideology in light of the exorbitant costs the Israeli people would have to pay to sustain their current levels of development and the vitality of their international relations — all these factors combined to permit social, political and intellectual conflicts to rise to the surface in Israeli society. These had previously been submerged and restrained by the single political position of the two major party blocs in Israel, which have dominated Israeli politics since the establishment of the state. Suddenly, political, social and cultural groups began to emerge in Israeli society that were independent from, and indeed defied the hegemony of, the two major political parties. These are clear manifestations of a sharp rift in Israeli society with regard to the current reality, the future character of the Israeli state in the region and the prospects of peace with the Palestinian people in particular and the Arabs in general.

Divisions have begun to surface within the two major parties themselves: between the left, open to prospects of peace with the Palestinians, and the extremist right; between the secular Jews and the religious conservatives, between Zionist absolutists and humanist realists. Moreover, the two major parties have begun to diverge from their customary unity in terms of the commitment to the traditional Zionist drive toward a "greater Israel," as the *Labour Party* screws its courage to *the sticking place* and adopts a concept of "an Israel at peace with the Palestinians and its Arab neighbours."

Prominent political personalities in Israel have shifted, according to Israeli standards and terms of reference, from "hawks: *to "doves". A prominent example is Yitzhak Rabin, the one-*time "general who crushed the bones of the Palestinian youth in the Intifada", who eventually recognised the PLO and conducted negotiations with the PLO leadership in order to reach a political settlement, indeed at the cost of his own life, which he lost to the *bullets of extremist Jewish fundamentalists*.

Simultaneously, we see now a wider range of formats for Palestinian-Israeli cooperation toward ending the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, liberating the Palestinian people, and fulfilling Palestinian aspirations to self-determination and statehood. The International Alliance for Peace which was founded with the Copenhagen Declaration of January 1997 was a natural outcome of these developments and a response to the transition of the focal point of the conflict to the "Israeli-Palestinian interior", where the diverse forces of the Palestinian people have begun to form a single front along with increasing sectors of the Israeli population, against the return to the ideology of a greater Israel as promoted by Netanyahu and his Likud government.

Yet some intellectuals remain who either deliberately overlook or simply do not know of these developments, and therefore re*main on the margins of history as the conflict and its resolution* take their course. This group of onlookers still insists on viewing Israel as a single, immutable entity, and continues to brandish the Arab nationalist slogan that the Arabs are the solid and steadfast bulwark behind the Palestinian people in their battle for *liberation. The fact is, however, that this "bulwark", as events* have demonstrated, has had and continues to have little sway or efficacy. It has enjoyed neither consistent contact nor complete solidarity with the Palestinian people in their ongoing battles and particularly in their current battle with the Likud.

That this "bulwark" refuses to acknowledge the reality of the existence of the PNA and the opposition movements on the ground in the territories, and somehow perceives the Palestinian struggle as being fought elsewhere, in other capitals of the Arab world, not only detracts from its purpose but transforms it into a *burden, since, in effect, it offers nothing to the Palestinian peo*ple other than idle slogans and paper tigers. Yet when some Egyptian or Arab intellectuals actually make the effort to bridge the gap between the Arab interior and the front line of battle within Palestine-Israel, these opponents accuse them of opening a breach in the united Arab front.

One of the most outspoken members of this group wrote in *Al-Shaab* newspaper criticising a self-appointed delegation of Egyptians who traveled to Israel in order to join a demonstration alongside the Palestinian people and the Peace Now movement, in protest against the construction of the settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in March of this year. He stated: "If the Egyptians who demonstrated in Jerusalem were real men, they would have protested in front of the Israeli Embassy in Cairo." This man, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper and a leader of one of the country's political parties, believes that the strongest stand one can take against the Israeli enemy is to organise a demonstration in front of the Israeli Embassy in Cairo. Since he fears the consequences of a *potential confrontation with* Egyptian security forces, however, he asks the International Alliance to "prove its masculinity" by staging this demonstration in his stead. He is perfectly incapable of perceiving the significance of a joint Arab-Israeli demonstration, the first of its kind in the history of the struggle, being staged in the heart of Jerusalem against the Israeli government.

Another of these critics ignores the resistance being waged by the Palestinian people on the ground, through both the PNA and the Palestinian opposition. Instead of racking his brain to discover a constructive way of supporting the Palestinian struggle, all he can do is to advise Yasser Arafat to salvage what remains of his honour, abandon the PNA and return once more to exile in Tunisia!

Such attitudes are nothing but an extension of that fatal defeatist logic that characterised the Arabs' conduct in the conflict of 1948 — a war for which the Palestinians, and the Arabs in general, have paid and continue to pay such a heavy toll. "Leave the land and spare your honour," the Arabs exhorted their Palestinian brethren in 1948. Is this really a cover version of that old tune?

That this group of critics has nothing to offer is perhaps most tellingly revealed in their attempt to fabricate public opinion that would back up their opposition to the International Alliance for an Arab-Israeli Peace. They issued what they called a com*muniqué from Arab intellectuals on 15 February 1997*. Some of those who had signed the communiqué later contacted me in order to clarify their point of view.

To site three examples, Dr Samir Amin, the internationally renowned Arab thinker, wrote to me via a common friend that he *had no information on the Copenhagen Declaration and would* appreciate any documentation I could send him so that he could formulate an opinion. In spite of this, his name appeared on the communiqué.

The second instance involves Karim Muruwwa, another prom*inent Arab intellectual and a leader of the Lebanese Communist* Party. When I spoke to him in Cairo, Karim Muruwwa told me that, although he opposed the Copenhagen Declaration, he also opposed the "communiqué of Arab intellectuals" even though his name appeared on it. After he had read it, he explained, he learned that the communiqué also opposed a peaceful political solution to the conflict, a position that he could not agree with in principle. Evidently, he had agreed to have his name appear on the communiqué without first reading its contents, only to learn later that he had ranked himself among those who are opposed to *peace in principle*.

The third case is that of Dr Laila Al-Sherbini, who stated that she was totally surprised to find her name on that document and that no one had even approached her to inform her about the communiqué.

This spurious behaviour not only belies any claim these critics may make to represent Egyptian and Arab intellectuals, but exposes them to exactly the same accusation which they leveled at those who participated in the Copenhagen Declaration — that they claimed to represent Arab intellectuals. There is a difference, *however. Those who participated in Copenhagen stated* clearly that they had signed the Copenhagen Declaration purely in their personal capacity and were expressing their own personal views, even if they confessed to a belief that they were also expressing the desire of ordinary people everywhere for peace.

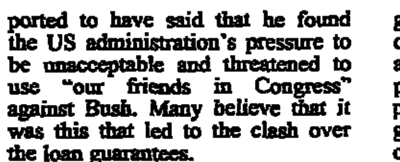
The critics also accused the participants in the Copenhagen Declaration of having ignited a civil war among Arab intellectuals, an accusation founded simply upon the notion that the Copenhagen initiative expressed a new and original view at variance with prevalent opinion or more pertinently the accepted *hand-me-down stance. It is odd that this accusation should be* leveled by some of the foremost proponents of democracy, plurality and tolerance for differences in opinion, at least if one is to judge by their many lengthy articles and proclamations in the press on these topics.

At any of the seminars and conferences organised by these group of old-hat intellectuals, one may inevitably see at least one of them stand up and regurgitate the same old ideological formulas about the conflict, formulas that have long been left behind by the rapid changes in events. Then another will rise to offer some "sound advice" that *in reality* contributes *nothing* new to stimulate either thought or action.

I do not believe we have a precedent in human history for a victory in war or in peace won by critics, cowering on the sidelines, capable only of reciting the old ideological ditties and lashing out at those who ventured to *diverge* from the *orthodox line* and the hand-me-down dirges.

'Our friends in Congress' toe the line

The Middle East peace process is being fought out in the US Congress, writes **James Zogby**. As the Israeli lobby pulls the strings, the administration is under pressure to sanction the Palestinians — and Egypt, and to transfer the US Embassy to Jerusalem



The future of the Middle East peace process hangs in the balance, awaiting action by the Clinton administration. It is clear that, without pressure from the US, the process will remain at a standstill, if it does not collapse.

There is a great deal of discussion in Washington about what the administration can or will do. A few weeks ago, there was some talk of a dramatic US initiative. The rumours have abated somewhat due to Netanyahu's insistence that there be no compromise on the Jebel Abu Ghneim settlement and the Palestinian refusal to accept anything less than a cessation of construction at that site.

The Israeli prime minister's recent legal troubles have cast an additional pall over the process. He has emerged from the crisis emboldened but weakened. Netanyahu now appears to be more indebted to the far right of his coalition and, therefore, not at all inclined to any new initiatives that might require compromise.

While distressed at this turn of events, many US officials, even those known to be pro-Israel, are privately speaking with impatience about the prime minister. Some even warn of an impending clash between the US and Israel.

Despite acknowledgment that such a confrontation is necessary, it is unclear whether or not the administration will risk the clash, especially given domestic US electoral and political repercussions. And even if the administration finds the political will to directly challenge Likud policies, the story will not *end there*. Any challenge this Democratic president poses to Israel will be met by a hostile response from the Republican-led Congress.

The ability to use Congress as a lever against *administration* pressure has always been a key aspect of Israel's US strategy. This has been true whether the two branches of government were of the same party or not. It is especially true now that this Republican leadership is so closely wedded to the Likud Party and its policies.

Historical examples abound. During the Gulf War, when President Bush pressed Israel to defer to the US-led coalition effort against Iraq and not take any unilateral actions, *Shamir* was outraged. In an Israeli press interview, Shamir was reported to have said that he found the US administration's pressure to be unacceptable and threatened to use "our friends in Congress" against Bush. Many believe that it was this that led to the clash over the loan guarantees.

Similarly, before his first visit to the US after being elected prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu was advised to court Congress as a way to ward off any administration pressure that might be placed on his government.

Israel's leaders can make these threats and develop these strategies because of the influence that pro-Israeli groups exercise on Congress. Their sway over Congress is a func*tion of a well-developed (and, I feel, overrated) perception* they have created — to wit, that they can defeat any candidate who turns against them.

Using intimidation, they have been able to manipulate Congress to limit administration flexibility or even to impose their own foreign policy initiatives in the administration — *as they did in 1995 with* the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act.

So, as the administration and the public debate the next steps to take in the peace process, pro-Israel groups and their allies in Congress are quietly orchestrating an effort that will further Israel's aims and further damage the search for Middle East peace.

As in recent years, this Congressional assault is taking place on three fronts: increasing aid to Israel above the allotted $3 billion in military and economic aid; placing new restrictions on US aid to the Palestinians; and passing other legislation that will serve Israeli policy objectives.

Some add-ons to Israel's aid are made as a result of agreements that Israel has reached with the administration. In other instances, Congressional initiatives are responsible for creating *special programmes* or benefits for Israel. In different years these have included: a US-Israel Science and Technology programme funded by the US Department of Commerce; a programme funded by the Department of Agriculture; hundreds of millions in special Defence Department joint programmes; special add-ons for *Soviet Jewish refugees*; and a bizarre extra bonus to help Israel create a foreign aid programme of its own. In total, during the past two years, these add-ons have yielded over $1.2 billion in extra US assistance to Israel.

What is interesting about these Congressionally driven add-ons is how easily they are accepted and passed, despite Congressional concerns with balancing the overall budget. Very few opposition voices are ever heard regarding Israeli add-ons. Some members support these projects, hoping to gain additional support for the pro-Israel Jewish community; some support these efforts for fear that, if they do not, these same forces will turn against them; and *some, actually do support* these programmes because they are deeply committed to Israel and believe that they are doing what must be done to support another country. Most members of Congress, however, simply accept these power plays by the supporters of Israel and allow them to pass because they accept their passage as inevitable. In the absence of any counter-pressure, they feel powerless to stop them.

While increasing aid on the Israeli side beyond the allotted $3 billion, there are also efforts underway in Congress to either suspend aid to the Palestinians or to add more restrictions to their $75 million aid package.

There have been repeated efforts to block Palestinian aid ever since the programme was first announced four years ago. This year's effort may be the strongest to date.

In previous years, the administration has weighed in heavily to protect the Palestinian aid programme, and it was supported in this matter by the Labour-led Israeli government. Both vouched for the Palestinians' need and supported the Palestinian Authority's efforts to comply with the peace accords.

This year, the administration's ef*forts will most likely be met with* strong Congressional opposition. It is not clear whether the pro-Israel lobby will support Palestinian aid if the Likud-led government is op*posed to continuing the programme*.

The right-wing and Likud supporters in Congress appear to be in no mood to listen to either the administration or supporters of the peace process. They have for weeks been echoing Israeli charges that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat gave a "green light" to terrorism. Based on this charge, many members of Congress are calling for a suspension of the Palestinian aid programme.

Currently a number of letters are circulating in Congress collecting *endorsements of a demand* that the President suspend Palestinian aid. Last week Republican Majority Leader Newt Gingrich asked a Republican member of the House International Relations *Committee to* propose legislation calling for further restrictions on aid to the Palestinian Authority.

It is still possible that the administration will prevail in its effort to convince Congress to continue the Palestinian programmes — but it will be a difficult battle.

If these battles to increase Israeli aid and cut or further restrict the Palestinian programme are not enough of a challenge for the administration and supporters of Middle East peace, there are other initiatives that may pose even more difficult problems in the near future.

Some members are actually proposing punitive aid cuts against Egypt because of what they term "*its obstructionist role in the peace* process" and to punish Egypt's leaders for not speaking out against anti-Israel cartoons that have appeared in Egypt's newspapers!

Should the hitherto sacrosanct Egyptian aid package be tampered with, this would cause the administration and the peace process a serious problem.

At the same time, not satisfied with the damage they have done by legislating the transfer of the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, some members have succeeded in further complicating the problem. Since the administration has resorted to a "national security waiver" to stall the embassy move, Congress is intent on forcing the administration's hand with more punitive legislation. In an amendment added to the State Department Authorisation Bill (the legislation that funds all State Department activity), Congress is now proposing the following: that $25 million from the 1998 State Department budget be set aside for the construction of the embassy in Jerusalem; that none of the State Department funds can be spent on the Jerusalem consulate unless the consulate is brought under the direct supervision of the US ambassador to Israel; and that the State Department cannot spend moneys on any publication which lists countries and their capitals unless they state that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.

What Israel's supporters in Congress hope to accomplish with such efforts is to press the administration to bend further in Israel's direction and to back off against any pressure against the Likud government.

The battleground for Middle East peace is here, in Washington and the Congress, as much as it is in the Middle East. It is clear from recent polls that the US public will not stand for such Congressional antics, but in the absence of a major campaign to inform the public and challenge the Congress, the efforts of the pro-Israel forces will do their *damage*. The *administration will* fight back, and Arab Americans and allies of the peace process will fight as well — but the battle requires an informed and outraged public if it is to be won.

The writer is the president of the Washington-based Arab-American Institute.

The significance of seven

Do numbers and dates have any bearing on the course of events? **Salah Montasser** ponders the question



Any close observer of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the course it has followed over the years will immediately notice a few points related to this issue.

In 1897, 100 years ago, at the first Zionist conference, *headed by Theodor Herzl, the Jewish dream of establishing* a state for Jews on the land of Palestine was put forward. At the same conference, international Zionism laid down the settlement policy in Palestine, which included the construction of settlements and encouraging mass Jewish migration to Palestine.

In 1917, 80 years ago, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, named after the then British foreign minister. In the declaration which appeared in the form of a letter addressed to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the Zionist movement, Lord Balfour indicated that the British government sympathised with the idea of establishing a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, and pledged that Britain would do its utmost to bring about this objective.

In 1947, 50 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly resolved to partition Palestine in Resolution 181, allocating 56 per cent of the land to the establishment of a Jewish state, and 43 per cent to the establishment of a Palestinian state, with less than one per cent, the size of Jerusalem, to be administered by the UN. Shortly after the Arabs rejected the partition plan, the first Arab-Israeli war erupted.

In 1967, 30 years ago, Israel occupied Sinai, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank, using former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser's decision to block the Straits of Tiran as a pretext for the invasion. This shifted the focus of the conflict from the liberation of Palestine to the liberation of all the occupied territories.

Also in 1967, 30 years ago, UN Resolution 242 was issued, *institutionalising the Israeli presence and setting a new* precedent for the conflict. This resolution was entirely different from the partition plan, which was not mentioned thereafter.

In 1977, 20 years ago, former Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat embarked on his historic visit to Jerusalem, which ended in the signing of the Camp David agreement, the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and the restoration of Egypt's territories.

In 1987, 10 years ago, the Intifada exploded and a generation of Palestinian stone-throwers was born. Israelis had assumed that the Palestinians had relinquished the last vestiges of national sentiment. The Intifada, therefore, was responsible for many conceptual changes in Israel. Among the most notable outcomes of the Palestinian uprising were the PLO-Israeli agreements, which are deteriorating further every day.

The foregoing seven major events occurred in 1897, 1917, 1947, 1967, 1977 and 1987. This year may also prove fateful. What do the remaining months of 1997 hold? We can only wonder.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Honestly speaking

What a tangled web they weave, when politicians once practice to deceive. Of course, this is rarely done intentionally — or so one would like to believe.

While the US has long-sought to tout itself as the sole "honest broker" of peace — to that extent that it would marginalise any and all European efforts — it has remained steadfastly opposed to taking any decisive action that would "encourage" Netanyahu to remain true to the text of Oslo.

This however, is nothing new. How could Clinton, who is bogged down waist-deep in scandals of his own adopt a holier-than-thou attitude towards an equally disreputable character like the Israeli premier? The answer is: He cannot. Clinton can ill-afford to alienate an already antsy, and exceedingly powerful, Jewish lobby.

Ironically, Clinton still believes that the key to peace can be found only with US help. He, however, has not been so quick to offer such a solution — only venturing so far as to say that the other parties must agree on a formula for resuming negotiations, or else. Or else what? According to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, or else the US will shift its foreign policy efforts elsewhere; to regions more willing to buy lock, stock and barrel, into a yet-undiscovered formula for peace.

Albright's statements, bold as they may seem, are perhaps little more than wishful thinking. Although no one can force the US to participate in the peace process, it is unlikely that Clinton, himself, would be willing to forsake the limelight and the fame resulting from having brokered such a delicate accord.

To add some bite to her bark, Albright further added that US envoy Dennis Ross would not be going back to the region until the talks are back on track. There is, after all, nothing like coming in at the end of the game, scoring the final touchdown and reaping all the glory. This scenario is much more attractive than, for example, impressing upon Netanyahu, in no uncertain terms, that domestic political interests should not supersede the safety of the region. But then again, is Clinton the right man to pass on this message?

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Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax: 5786126/5786833

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B IX9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

Technology and culture

Ibrahim Nafie examines the cultural foundations on which Arab integration can be built

Recent developments in the Middle East have given impetus to the establishing of an Arab common market. As Netanyahu has delivered blow after blow to the peace process, all other *concepts for regional integration have lost credibility.* I have always believed that Arab integration constitutes the best possibility for building and consolidating Arab strength against the challenges posed by international developments and a deteriorating peace process.

I have stressed the importance of benefiting from previous Arab and international experiences of regional integration. From my reading of these experiences, I have concluded that any renewed endeavour to establish an Arab common market must be based on realistic political assessments in order to ensure that the enterprise succeeds. As a first step towards this end, I recommended that the countries that signed the Damascus Declaration should form the core of any grouping. These countries would then focus efforts on laying the groundwork for a common market, concentrating their energies on four fields of activity capable of promoting economic growth without excessive cost. These fields are Arab culture, petroleum and energy, electronics and infrastructural development. In this article, I will attempt to propose some ideas that might contribute to the necessary process of research and planning for the institution of practical programmes for the promotion of cultural integration.

The cultural ties uniting the Arab World are deeply rooted and widespread and could therefore serve as a viable foundation for a practical programme for integration.

Strengthening channels of inter-Arab cultural exchange is essential if we are to meet the challenges of today's world, a world marked by astounding advances in communications technology. Electronic data networks, satellite television and the rapidly spreading access to Internet all involve, as their primary currency of exchange, culture in its broadest sense. Culture, after all, is that broad area that comprises everything concerned with the arts and sciences, indeed all that is produced by the human intellect, and in its totality it constitutes an acquired storehouse of knowledge that offers mankind the potential to develop his critical and aesthetic capacities and refine modes of human intercourse.

Yet, with all the potential modern communications technology offers, it carries the danger of Western cultural invasion. What is required, in the face of the massive influx of Western fed media, is to initiate a broadly based dialogue among Arab intellectuals and officials as to the best means to promote Arab cultural integration.

Education, of course, would be a logical starting point, since education is the key to developing a collective Arab consciousness among younger generations. There is an urgent need to reformulate curricula, both to keep up with technological advance and to foster a deeper awareness of shared roots. Creativity and initiative, combined with a critical spirit, must be encouraged within the framework of commonly held religious and social values.

Obviously such developments will require funding, for without improved facilities any reformulation of curricula would remain futile. Similarly, fostering an enhanced Arab consciousness requires greater emphasis on the social sciences, and an objective approach to Arab civilisation that leaves no room for propaganda.

To further the impetus towards integration, exchanges between teachers and students across the Arab world should be encouraged. And in both these domains Egypt *can play a leading* role since it has already actively fostered such exchanges. Suffice to say that between 1982 and 1992 the number of Egyptian teachers seconded to universities abroad has almost trebled, with some 98 percent of the total working within the Arab world. Student exchanges, particularly at the university level, have also shown healthy growth. Not that this is a new phenomenon. Cairo University, and before that Al-Azhar, have always welcomed students from other Arab countries. Between 1990-1995 the number of students from the Arab world attending Egyptian universities has never been less than 10,000 per annum. To further encourage exchanges will requires increased funding. Lessening bureaucratic procedures would also be helpful in stimulating exchanges.

In addition to focusing on education, we must also pay attention to the potential offered for greater mutual understanding by satellite transmissions. Development in this area requires close coordination by Arab countries if they are to develop their own programming capacity in order to redress current imbalances caused by the dominance of Western programming that does not necessarily conform with the cultural priorities of the Arab world. There are already more than 20 Arab satellite stations, providing a base from which to develop a more consistent service, which should, ideally, escape its current over-dependency on Western news and information sources.

As far as literature, theatre and cinema are concerned, cooperation must be encouraged. *Joint publishing ventures, with titles priced to* attract ordinary readers, must be developed. The same applies to theatrical productions. Once again, sources of funding must be found in the short term, though in the long term such joint ventures could well prove lucrative. Arab cinema, of course, has always been dominated by Egyptian production, so much so that the crisis that has afflicted the Egyptian film industry can be viewed as a regional problem, requiring coordinated action.

The press has already made many advances, advances in which *Al-Ahram* has played the leading role. There remains, though, much room for improvement, conditional upon co-operation between the leading press institutions within the various Arab countries.

Last, but not least, information technology constitutes the fourth area requiring attention. A computer manufacturing base must be established, programmes tailored to Arab needs must be developed, and the telecommunications infrastructure necessary for optimum computer use must be installed across the Arab world. And this will be possible only if Arab countries join together to pursue such goals.

Enhancing cultural integration is the responsibility of the entire Arab world. Coordinated action is therefore necessary if, as a region, we are to enter the next century equipped to face the challenges posed.

Information apartheid

In this second instalment of his paper to a UN-Colombia University roundtable debate on the new media held in New York last week, **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses the danger of an Information apartheid threatening most of the world population at a time of Information glut

Early net dreamers saw interconnectivity, this new wired universe, as a springboard for the development of so-called 'virtual communities' which would offer each other mutual support and conviviality in a global digital commune. Such views are supported by powerful present-day politicians. Al Gore in the United States and Tony Blair in the United Kingdom are typical specimens of the new visionaries of digital politics. As Al Gore puts it, information superhighways should become the United States' top strategic priority. The implicit postulate here is that America's achievements in this field can be extended to all communities worldwide, a generalisation that can easily be refuted.

To begin with, there is the cost of joining the Internet, obviously prohibitive given the average income of citizens in the less developed countries, while representing for the middle classes in the developed countries a relatively negligible proportion of their income. Access to the Internet is not equal for all. Thus although the Information Revolution, a main pillar of contemporary globalism, is presented as speaking in the name of humankind as a whole, it in fact represents only a given elite.

Moreover, in terms of infrastructure, what is possible for America cannot be generalised in all societies. The size of the Internet is supposed to be doubling every year, and if this is true everybody on the planet will be connected by the year 2000. But there is a critical threshold that cannot be crossed. As South Africa's Deputy President Thabo Mbeki once put it: "Half of humanity has never made a telephone call. The reality is that there are more telephone lines in Manhattan than in all sub-Saharan Africa!" One can still talk of an Information apartheid. Bipolarity has taken a number of forms throughout the 20th century: East-West, North-South, future-oriented/past-oriented. 'Informational bipolarity' could be added to this list.

Internet had its origins in the military establishment and, as such, was part of the public domain in its initial stage. Now it is becoming predominantly part of the private domain. The privatisation of the networks of regional science foundations in the United States marked the emergence of a commercial basis for the present interconnected networks. The most significant change in the character of the World Wide Web was the irresistible rise of its commercial sites. If it were an economy, it would be the triumph of the free market over central planning. But with the expansion of privatisation, it is pornography rather than education, training and health issues that are expanding the fastest. Tastes and private interests seem to be out of synch with the proclaimed aims of the gurus of the *Information* Age. *Internet is less likely to fulfil their* inspiring promises than to become a haven for high-tech terrorism by facilitating the illicit activities of underworld mafias and drug dealers, organised crime, deviant sexual trysts and amateur or professional hackers out to derail national and international institutions.

But the notion of Information apartheid should be scrutinised more carefully. As previously mentioned, one main contribution of the Information Revolution is to have de-sanctified the vision of the world as it appears to the human senses. The microprocessor and other forerunners of machine intelligence have shaken the human species' homo-centric vision of the world and deprived it of its centrality, exclusiveness and absoluteness as a frame of reference. Computers have proved that miniaturised robot-like machines operating at speeds far exceeding human biological rhythms could be no less indispensable to humanity's aspiration to improve its condition and dominate its *environment.*

With the perception of the human species as the centre of the universe discredited and falsified, another notion can also lose its validity, namely, that the species must only be conceived as an indivisible whole. Computer illiterates can appear as redundant, and this is how Information apartheid becomes a real threat. Along this line of thinking, similarities between the structure of information networking and the laws of the market are striking. In both cases, we are dealing with allegedly self-regulatory systems, which by their very nature are impaired whenever human authority (the state, ideology, ethics, legislation, etc) intervenes and tries to subject them to man-regulated mechanisms. Any attempt at censoring information of whatever kind (even on pornography, drug-trafficking, money laundering, organised crime, high-tech terrorism, etc) comes up against the very essence of the Information Revolution, its fundamental principle that the free flow of information must under no circumstances be constrained. This last assumption confronts us with the key question of what information means in the Information Age.

If information, like money, is a source of power, information will have more to do with its sender than with its recipient. However interactive information can become, power will be in the hands of those who manufacture information hardware and software and hold the secrets of virtual reality technology. And because *pertinent information is only live information,* this latter is liable to manipulation by those who hold power — even through remote control, thanks to the information webs. And, because electronic information is intangible and still ambivalent as to where it stands with respect to the legal concept of property, its manipulators enjoy tremendous power. So far, military power remains the supreme expression of power. But with the unfolding of the Information Age the power of information could eventually come to supersede military power. In the post-information world, information threatens to become systematic misinformation — a threat that has to be faced before it is too late.

Moreoever, the glut of information often makes it banal, uninteresting and unattractive. And because information is a market, incentives are necessary to enhance its market value. So stimulants such as sensationalism, eroticism, violence, and more *fundamentally, the degradation and perversion of culture,* are introduced.

Furthermore, the micro-world of computer chips, because it is beyond our physical reach, can get out of hand. We have seen cases of benevolent hackers decrypting codes protecting top sensitive information at the very heart of the institutions of leading world states. We have seen stock exchanges succumb to the destabilising effect of computer-based speculation. We cannot exclude the possibility of one day seeing smart robots turning against their human creators in a post-modernist replay of the old sorcerer's apprentice legend. Given the precarity of the situation, it is not unthinkable that the world nuclear arsenals be unleashed in chain reaction. How can preemptive measures be taken to avoid a global conflagration by mistake? I believe that many of the issues I tried to highlight in this background paper stand at the core of any systematic thinking on how to reconcile contemporary communications technology with the requirements of peace, development, democracy and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Global Village.

In labour lies salvation

By Naguib Mahfouz

In three years, we will celebrate the first Labour Day of the 21st century.

Work will become the cornerstone of our survival in the next century. We are entering an unpredictable phase. We talk about developments such as a new world order, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), new methods of communication, technological advancement. These developments *are a source of concern to some,* who wonder what the next century holds for us. Others believe that we will be drowned in the deluge of events.

We should focus on working hard and being productive. Relying on God and our labour, we will not find ourselves lost in a competitive world where the unproductive are but a burden on others, expecting handouts and charity.

We must not underestimate our capacity to work. Our history and civilisation was established on hard work. The working class in our society, especially the peasants and work*ers, may appear to be absent* from political and managerial life, but they toil constantly for meagre rewards.

Work is an intrinsic value to Egyptians and this gives us hope that we will have a place in the next century. Work will remain the cornerstone of our lives, now and in the future.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Who's listening?

Al-Ahali: "Most of the current discussions about normalisation are confused, purposeless and verging on the aggressive. They also lack objectivity to the point of being personally motivated... The alarming thing is that they give the impression that opposition to normalisation began at the time of the Copenhagen Declaration three months ago rather than 20 years ago. Everybody talks but no one listens. The objective does not seem to be to achieve results or to work out a common approach to normalisation, which has turned out to be the Arabs' last weapon."
(*Amina El-Naqqash*, 23 April)

Al-Wafd: "Political reform is necessary for any economic reform. We cannot argue that the Asian tigers have succeeded without democracy... The Egyptian people cannot be treated like some Asian nations. The Egyptians have experienced democracy and know its meaning. Only democracy can revive the Egyptian people, help combat terrorism and corruption, purify the political atmosphere and put a brake on the government."
(*Mohamed El-Hayawan*, 23 April)

Al-Shaab: "Yes, we should celebrate the return of Sinai. All civilised nations mark their victories and set them out as lessons for future generations. But the problem is how should we celebrate? The current celebrations are such that one no longer knows the difference between Evacuation Day, the Revolution anniversary, Suez Day, October 1973, Sinai Day or Sham El-Nessim. On each occasion there are *dancers and singers performing.* Over the past few days the national press was full of news of these dancers and singers instead of reports on new development projects in Sinai."
(*Mohamed Hilal*, 25 April)

Al-Mussawar: "Before we take pride in the increasing volume of transactions in our nascent stock exchange, we should examine how much money has gone into new investments, how many new products or services came into being, and how many jobs have been created to lessen unemployment. If our examination proves positive, only then can we rejoice. Otherwise, we should take measures to put things right and protect our stock exchange from being manipulated by professional speculators."
(*Abdel-Qader Shohayeb*, 25 April)

Al-Ahram: "The document *Egypt and the 21st century* should be taken very seriously, for it advocates preparedness for the coming century. It contains very little on the past and much on the future. The document presents a new geographical map of Egypt as it moves from the old Valley to new valleys in Sinai and the South. It is an industrial, agricultural and touristic map which can be considered a blueprint for development. It goes beyond the concept of economic and social reform in Egypt to encompass radical change which can be called a 'revolution' by any standard."
(*Ibrahim Nafie*, 25 April)

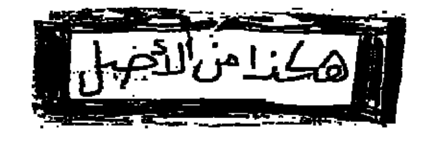
Al-Arabi: "Now we find someone who would issue a religious *fatwa* that agrarian reform was a sin. How can transforming millions of serfs to respectable farmers, able to provide education and health care for their children, be against the tenets of a religion which calls for justice and equality among people? We also find someone to issue a *fatwa that extending* land-rent contracts contravenes Islam, without explaining how he and other *ulema* kept quiet about it for 50 years, only to see the light when the World Bank and the IMF said so and the government acquiesced... Gentlemen, do not trifle with religion."
(*Galal Aref*, 28 April)

Rose El-Youssef: "What exactly did this Supreme Guide have in mind when he advocated the *rupture* of the national unity that Egypt has held so dear for thousands of years, by saying that Christians should not be enlisted in the armed forces? Was he not in fact advocating factional strife which is hitherto unknown in Egyptian history? Mustafa Mashhour's disciples do not realise that the nation cannot accept a division within its ranks. National identity is the fundamental right of all regardless of their religious beliefs. Egypt's history shines with examples of national unity. Its people believe that religion is for God and the nation for all. We are a united nation, have been so before the advent of religions and will remain so for ever. The words of this guide should not go unchallenged. He is a guide in need of guidance."
(*Ahmed Hamroush*, 28 April)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



Major's piercing gaze is the central axis of his policy, the ... at the centre of a moving circle represented by his spe... nose, like a small red balloon, resembles that of a ca... acter. His mouth and jaw, on the other hand, clamp do... word, as if to ward off the challenge to his authority.
When I was drawing him, I was reminded of John McE... for both his antics and his skill, although these are hidd... case. His gestures also reminded me of McEnroe ser... His opponent, Blair, hides his eyes beneath bushy e... seems optimistic and certain of victory. Can he predict ... of the elections?



Close up

Salama A. Salama

The end of the line

Ever since the peace process went into total eclipse thanks to Netanyahu, the Arabs have spared no effort in proving that they desire peace, are ready to resume negotiations, wish to solve problems, oppose violence and terrorism, and are convinced that peace is the one and only way open in the short and the long term. They only ask that Israel abide by its Oslo commitments and that Netanyahu's government stop the construction of settlements, a policy which alters the status quo in Jerusalem. They also would like America — as the main guarantor of the peace process — to return to the negotiating table with reasonable proposals which would not drag Palestinian dignity through the lust nor destroy what remains of the Palestinians' ghts.

Ten months later, these pes have vanished — Neyahu has not budged an h. The Clinton administran has not succeeded in ving him nor in main-ing its previous positions. as become clear to the Arthat even the bases on h the peace process was ded in Madrid are now to bargaining, and that ican pressure, instead ing applied on the Nehu government to enge it to abide by its itments, is in fact being to induce the Palns to consent to ever oncessions, and to perhe Arab states to prese Palestinians and flatel.

American position made crystal-clear N the American adAtion expressed its Teure over the Arab Te which decreed a on normalisation Orael. It then used its ainst two successive Uy Council resoluWpproved by an overing majority, against iraeli violations in Jem and the settlements, confirmed its negative on through the cam- against Egypt in the Congress, backed by President Al Gore.

ould seem that this an position has been d as firm policy and affect the policy of Eu- states. This was re- in the stand taken by d, which headed the ean Union delegation he Euro-Mediterranean ership conference held Malta, and which refused iscuss the peace process e in the Middle East, nor en mention it in its final mmuniqué. This was also lected in the position taken Germany, which abined from voting in the eneral Assembly over the solution to condemn Israel. ese are indications that merica is helping to inuence a certain European end favouring Netanyahu, nd allowing American efrts and Israeli inflexibility force the Arabs back to the egotiating table under contions acceptable to Israel, nditions obviously agreed by the American envoy, nis Ross. The Americans Israelis are betting that ragility of the Palestinian ion will eventually force it to accept whatever he esented with.

is was shown to be corby the discussions Dr na El-Baz held in Washn, which led to no conresult. In addition this reflected in the warnings President Mubarak over ast few weeks in which escribed the current sitn in the Middle East as vorst it has ever been and erican efforts as fruitless.

spite of all this, President Mubarak is said to be king of a summit, to be nded by some of the parconcerned with the peace ess, on condition that Isfirst adopts a positive pon which will help the ting succeed. But his intive has not been received husiastically by either the or Israel.

lence the importance of President's latest tour, and discussions he has held or ll be holding in Saudi Araand Kuwait, followed by cussions with President fez El-Assad and other ab leaders, with the aim of ting on a concerted Arab nd in the peace process, in er to provide some sort of unterweight to the US's erwhelmingly pro-Israel is. As President Mubarak said, the intention is not convene an Arab summit thout fixed objectives and thout a result, but one ere the Arabs know what ey are doing — in other ords, where the Arabs reise what they are capable of.



Soapbox

If it walks like a duck...

I am a businessman, not a politician. But it is very difficult to divorce politics from economics in this day and age.

In the Middle East, Egypt has led the pursuit of peace. Our courageous initiative created an unprecedented opportunity for growth in the region. But I am concerned that early dividends are being squandered by the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Before last June, prospects for cooperation were increasing daily. On 13 September 1993, the Palestinians and Israelis reached their first agreement, heralding plans for regional economic cooperation. In October 1994, the Middle East and North Africa Economic Summit brought politicians and businessmen together for the first time. The second MENA summit defined the building of regional institutions. Despite scepticism and difficulties, economic cooperation between Arabs and Israelis had a real chance.

It is to President Mubarak's credit that MENA III not only took place, but was a resounding success, the first MENA conference at which business really took place.

But today, Israel is responsible for bringing the peace process to the verge of collapse. Netanyahu's conduct can only serve to further isolate Israel from its neighbours, to the economic detriment of the region as a whole.

It is time for the US and other peace-loving nations to call a spade a spade. If it walks, quacks, and flies like a duck, it must be a duck. Netanyahu is the spanner in the works of regional economic cooperation. The sooner we all recognise it, the sooner we can tackle the really important issues.



This week's Soapbox speaker is chairman of the ARTOC Group and head of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt.

M. Shafik Gabr

Breaking the silence

Europe is beginning to contest the US's monopoly on peace brokerage, writes **Eric Rouleau**. The result could be a more equitable settlement

A few weeks after the Gulf War, Jim Baker paid a visit to his "friend" Roland Dumas to tell him the "good news": the US had decided "to hold a conference to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict, in accordance with President Mitterrand's wishes," as the secretary of state began, before adding: "But neither you, the French, nor the Europeans, will be associated with the initiative, because the Israelis don't want you, and, as for the Arabs, they are not opposed to your exclusion."

The French minister of foreign affairs at the time could not hide his deep disappointment. François Mitterrand had hoped — and perhaps believed — that France's participation in the liberation of Kuwait would earn him the gratitude of the anti-Iraqi coalition and, therefore, a place at the negotiating table. In this manner, he would have accomplished the goal of all his predecessors at the Elysée Palace, starting with General de Gaulle.

One tends to forget, however, that the United States have always insisted on monopolising the role of "mediator" in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Henry Kissinger, the embodiment of this hegemonic will, aborted the Peace Conference after a single session, held in Geneva in December 1973, in order to push the UN and the other members of the Security Council out of the process. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the State Department justified its exclusivism to the European allies by emphasising the idea that it was absolutely necessary to prevent the "Russian Bear" from gaining a foothold in the Middle East. The argument was fallacious, but the illusion gained credibility in most European capitals.

Since General de Gaulle's presidency, however, France refused to buy the story. Reacting to Jim Baker's words in 1991, a sceptical Roland Dumas declared: "We wish you luck! We would be the first to rejoice if you were to succeed in your mission!"

A number of French experts, however, were convinced that the Madrid conference was very unlikely to lead to a balanced settlement acceptable to the Arabs. And despite the good intentions of President Bush and Jim Baker, Yitzhak Shamir, the prime minister of the Jewish state, managed to block any progress in the negotiations — as he cynically admitted after he had relinquished power. It is in fact quite striking to note, in retrospect, the US's chronic inability to bring about a global settlement to the conflict in the past few decades.

This is true to such an extent that the humourists who state that, "for the US, the important thing is not the peace but the process" seem justified. Henry Kissinger's so-called "step-by-step" policy led only into one impasse after the other. Only Anwar El-Sadat's initiative — his visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 — extricated President Carter from the quandary in which his impotence had landed him. Camp David was more an Israeli victory than an American achievement. By isolating Egypt, Menachem Begin managed to paralyse the Arab world without providing the slightest opening to the other Arabs involved in the conflict. The Oslo Accord, similarly, was concluded — for better or for worse — on the sidelines of the Madrid conference, in the absence, and perhaps against the will, of the United States. Yesterday and today, the US gives priority to agreements among states of the region, in order to "simplify" the thorny Palestinian problem. "Washington was hostile to any dialogue with the PLO," Nabil Shaath told me on the White House lawn, the day the Oslo Accord was signed in September 1993.

The members of the European Community, which, willy-nilly, had accepted to step down before the US, believing or pretending to believe that Washington would broker a final solution in the Middle East, began to worry shortly after the Likud's accession to power. Along with certain Arab states, they became gradually aware that the US was incapable of preventing the sabotage of the peace process, although it was this very process that had been initiated in collaboration with the Labour government. The US's unconditional support for the Jewish state, whatever the party in power, and regardless of whether or not the government's policy was aligned with US interests, contributes dangerously to re-igniting violence.

Europe views war and instability in the Middle East with far more trepidation than the US. Geographical proximity, the security of its oil supplies and, more generally, the prosperity of its economy, contribute to its vulnerability. Its own interests require that a settlement acceptable to the Arab world, in particular, be concluded. The absence of a powerful pro-Israeli lobby on the continent allows Europe to take a stand consistent with its needs and interests.

Members of the European Community, therefore, had little difficulty in adopting, at a conference in Vienna in 1980, a resolution calling for the return of the Occupied Territories to the Arabs, the recognition of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, "with all that this implies", and the integration of the PLO in any negotiations. Thirteen years before Oslo, this resolution was perceived as a provocation both in Israel and the United States.

Since the victory of the Likud in Israel, the Europeans are finding it increasingly difficult to tolerate their exclusion from a peace process that the United States were evidently incapable of bringing to term, while providing most of the funds to guarantee the success of the endeavour. The Europeans finance, or will finance, almost all the development projects in the Occupied Territories. They have already spent over five hundred million dollars in the past three years. Moreover, the Community is Israel's main economic partner and one of the main sources of the Jewish state's prosperity. Well aware of their potential influence, the Europeans have begun to exert more or less subtle pressures in a bid to influence the peace process.

France is not the only state to have postponed the ratification of the treaty between Israel and the European Community. Several European nations have taken this measure, citing "technical" reasons. It seems temporary, but is clearly a manifestation of dissatisfaction, and a warning to Mr Netanyahu. The European draft resolution presented to the Security Council, which criticised the colonisation of East Jerusalem, and which was vetoed by the US, is no less significant. Not only has Europe broken its silence and expressed its disagreement, it has also taken an initiative challenging the US government.

The decision taken on 8 April last to send a letter to President Clinton suggesting a common European-American initiative to re-start the peace process was also unprecedented: the first attempt to deprive the US of its monopoly in this matter. Furthermore, the European proposal was accompanied by a ten-point plan, most of which corresponds with the conditions set down by Yasser Arafat for the resumption of negotiations with Israel.

Point 5 of the plan confirms Europe's intention to involve itself in the peace process with the proposal that negotiations aiming to define the terms of a final settlement "take place with the support of the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the relevant regional parties" — an elegant way of internationalising the patronage of the peace process.

France, which has been an influential actor within the Community, obtained acceptance of this plan by including a key phrase in the letter addressed to the American government: "European ideas," it specifies, "are conceived in terms of complementarity and convergence with those of the United States."

Whether the wording was a diplomatic nicety aimed at reassuring the Americans, or expressed the sincere intention to go along with American hegemony in the Middle East, it is clear that the European states, even those closest to the US, will be led to practice a more independent policy if the situation deteriorates, or the Arabs take a firmer stand against the Netanyahu government and the US. A more active role for the Europeans will change the balance of power decisively, allowing for a solution acceptable to the Arabs — in other words, a lasting settlement.

Translated from French by ***Pascale Ghazaleh***

To The Editor

Negev surprise

Sir- As readers of your newspaper on a current basis we would like to convey to you our appreciation for the illuminating news and articles.

However, we were surprised to find in *Galal Nassar's article*, (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 3-9 April), under the title "Stillbirth to New Middle East" some misconceptions on the development of the Negev area in the south of Israel.

Our economic officer would be delighted to provide you with details on the subject of free zones and any other issues concerning regional cooperation.

Lior Ben Dor
Press Attaché
Israeli Embassy
Cairo

Two Turkeys

Sir- The objective analysis of Mr Eric Rouleau (Tale of Two Turkeys, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 10-16 April 1997), who knows Turkey very well, has underlined a serious problem facing Turkey, which I think will get even bigger if the military continues to influence the politics in the country and tries to manage the government with its informal directives.

A vast majority of the Turks do not support the military's actions, and question the legality of the National Security Council as an establishment superior to the parliament. There is no reasonable argument to justify rolling out tanks to a city because of a public meeting held to protest Israeli policies. How can the people be persuaded to accept such an act as legal?

One can easily predict that the problem of "two Turkeys" will get bigger unless the officials try to draw closer to public opinion. If they continue to behave as they do now, votes of the Refah Party will surely rise, despite all the disadvantages of having a government which has to face strong and unjust opposition throughout the world.

V. Yalcin Kaya
Marmara University
Istanbul, Turkey

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah — The archaeology of land for peace

The Arabs and Palestinians have been lambasting Netanyahu almost daily, since he came to power nearly a year ago, for dumping the land-for-peace formula, which is often also called the land-for-peace principle. Even before Netanyahu, the Labour government, under both Rabin and Peres, was often criticised for allegedly trying to wriggle out of its commitment to that very formula/principle, which was established by the 1991 Madrid conference as a basis, or framework, for Middle East peace.

Meanwhile, the Israelis, backed by a massive battery of American and other think-tankers, commentators, columnists, etc. have been giving the Arabs the run-around by floating alternative tradesmen's euphemisms: land-for-security; peace-for-peace; security-for-security; peace-for-security. The Arabs have angrily reiterated their insistence that there will be no retreat from the land-for-peace formula/principle/basis/framework. In turn, the Americans and Israelis have duly responded by reaffirming their own commitment to the same, albeit according to different interpretations.

Such word games have been an outstanding feature of the Arab-Israeli peace process. The most notable of these plays on words, of course, is the term "peace process" itself, which in all likelihood was first coined in the Middle East, and has since been offered to the world at large. While the words were never innocent, and invariably rigged against Palestinian and Arab rights, they always found an easy prey among our word-loving intellectuals, who set about elucidating, explaining and interpreting their terms. I recall a speech made by the late President Sadat in which he stumbled, searching for an Arabic equivalent for the word "momentum". Apparently Henry Kissinger, who had a special flair for word games of this sort, had convinced the Egyptian president a few days before that "we had to maintain a momentum for peace".

Land for peace was formulated as a sort of explanatory footnote to Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, the first of which was issued in the wake of the June War in 1967 and the second, basically reaffirming the first, in the wake of the October War of 1973. Who coined the formula, and exactly when, I confess to having failed to discover. I strongly suspect that it made its appearance, along with a whole barrage of other catchphrases such as "peace process", "momentum for peace", etc., some time in the mid-'70s — the time when Kissinger was busy talking in the Middle East, even as back home the wheels were turning that would ultimately and dramatically end his career for having listened when he shouldn't. Whether the famous "formula" is another of "Dear Henry's" cynical contributions to posterity, I do not know, though it definitely has a Kissingerish feel.

What is truly amazing is that no one seems to know. I have looked up various references, asked numerous Egyptian experts, and went so far as to "Ask Israel", using the e-mail service of the Israeli Foreign Ministry by that name. This column, I hope, will eventually generate an answer from someone with a better memory and/or research abilities than mine, but the paucity of information on the origins of "land for peace" is in itself truly remarkable in light of the buzz-word's countless appearances in official statements, commentaries, analyses, etc.

But for all the Arabs' devotion to land-for-peace, it could not have originated in the Arabic language. *Al-ard muqabil al-salam* smacks of translation and has none of the catchy finesse of today's media-conscious English usage. Indeed, from the mere ring of it, the "formula" is unlikely to have been invented anywhere else but in some US think-tank.

And a most pernicious invention it is. What, indeed, can be more pernicious than to heatedly defend, day-in day-out, something that was not yours to start with, that is inherently rigged against your interests, debases your fundamental rights and, not least, is a chimera with no basis in current or past reality?

No less than the very notion of the "peace process", land-for-peace 'trades off' fundamental rights; it debases the very essence of the Arab/Palestinian-Israeli confrontation from one of dispossession, usurpation and unabashed racial and national oppression, to one in which the oppressor and the oppressed are equated, each having something that the other wants. Much more pernicious, however, is the underlying assumption that Israel wants peace so much it would surrender Arab/Palestinian land, accept Palestinian self-determination, etc., in return. By saying this, the Arabs and the Palestinians are in fact conceding the totally distorted Zionist version of the history of the conflict: poor, small, beleaguered Israel wanting to live in peace with its neighbours, surrounded by fanatical, war-crazed Arab hordes bent on its destruction. Land in this equation is no longer Palestinian or Arab land, it is mere earth, something base and material — the people, their dispossession and subjugation, are made to disappear; the Arabs, backward, sensual and greedy seek mere acquisition, while the Israelis, Western and civilised, seek something intangible and noble, peace. With little more than a ditty, history, truth and morality are turned upside down.

Conceding history, principle and fundamental rights, this banner of the Arab peace offensive is without practical implication, even within the terms of the peace process. Since the disengagement agreements on the Egyptian and Syrian fronts in 1973, nearly a quarter of a century ago, the Arabs have had no peace to offer Israel. What they have been offering is "normalisation", yet another Israeli construct which, when translated into real terms, means conceding sovereignty over such things as with whom to trade, what to sell or buy, whether or not to exchange diplomatic, political, cultural, even security ties, etc., in return for sovereignty over your own territory.

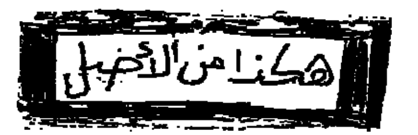
In the various Israeli-Palestinian agreements, from Oslo to the now defunct Abu Mazen-Yossi Beilin secret understandings, the whole so-called trade-off takes on farcical proportions, whereby the Palestinians are given formal sovereignty over some of their territory in return for conceding overall sovereignty in military, security, and economic relations and foreign policy affairs. In return for this, the rest of the Arabs are supposed to coax Israel by offering yet more, if less flagrant, concessions on their own sovereignty over the conduct of their foreign policy, economic ties and so on.

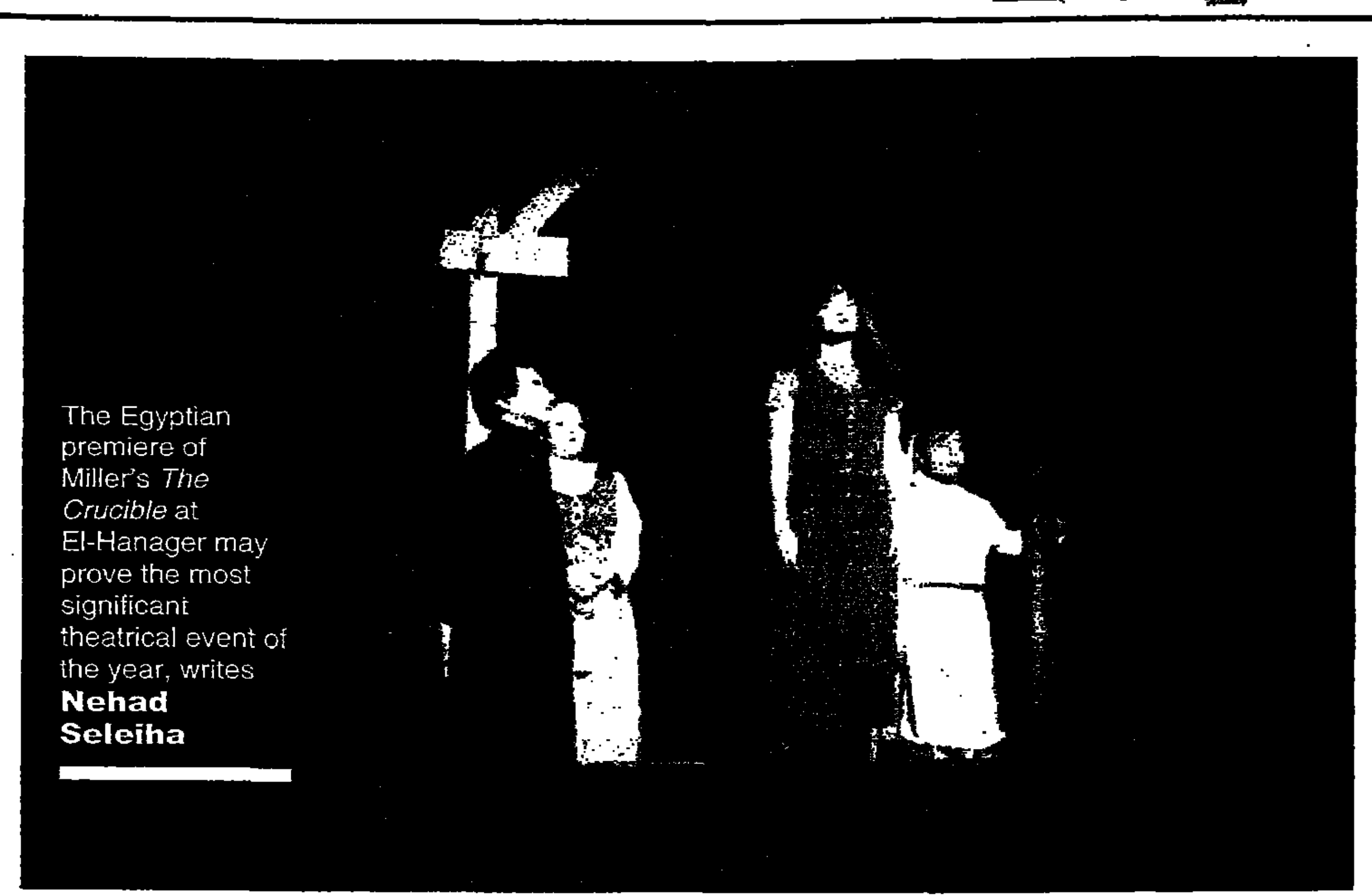
In the latter case, the Israelis are not dealing with the Arab states' commitment to Palestinian territorial rights. Rather, they are banking on the real need felt by the regimes of several Arab states for a "positive" Israeli contribution to safeguarding their precarious security. No trade-off is involved; what is needed is merely some face-saving deal that would allow these regimes to make arrangements with Israel palatable to their peoples. Moreover, the Israelis know that, as far as such immediate and influential neighbours as Egypt and Syria are concerned, "normalisation" will always be highly unstable and precarious, irrespective of the kind of deal they make on the "Palestinian track", and of any other bilateral and multilateral arrangements, for reasons that are inherent to the national security concerns of these two states. And if they can't guarantee Egypt, in particular, everything else they reach beyond it, or behind its back, remains a house of cards.

What remains, then, of the alleged trade-off? The Arabs have no peace to offer Israel, for to offer peace you must have the alternative option of war. "Normalisation", translated in real terms as concessions to Israel's hegemonic ambitions in the region, is, first of all, not really the Palestinians' to give, depends on needs that have little to do with the restoration of Palestinian rights, and remains, beyond the short term, a highly unstable and precarious prospect. If it is a Palestinian/Arab card, it is a very poor one indeed.

So why are the Palestinians and the Arabs clinging so tenaciously to "land-for-peace"? Gullibility? Not quite. They realise that the fundamental logic of the peace process is one of submission to US-Israeli dictates, with bargaining limited to the degree of submission. They realise, moreover, that their only real bargaining card in this respect is their own security — i.e. the threat that the lack of a face-saving settlement will destabilise them to the extent that forces "less moderate" than they, and less friendly to US and Western interests, will take over. In current Arab reality these forces are none other than the "Islamist threat". Knowing that, in terms of the peace process, their one source of strength is their vulnerability, that Arafat's negotiating 'muscle' lies precisely in Hamas's potential ability to dislodge him and take over command of the Palestinian people, they have an interest in perpetuating the illusion that they have something of worth to trade.

The problem of course is that neither the Americans nor their Israeli allies take the "Islamist threat" very seriously. I tend to agree with that assessment.





The Egyptian premiere of Miller's *The Crucible* at El-Hanager may prove the most significant theatrical event of the year, writes **Nehad Seleiha**

Which is witch?

Written in 1952, at the height of the McCarthy witchhunt, *The Crucible*, which Miller based on the court records of the Salem witch-trials of 1692, had its world premiere in 1953 at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York: it proved an instant hit and ran for 197 nights. Three years later, in 1956, Miller was called before the Congress Committee on Un-American Activities. On his choice of theme he has written: "I was drawn to this subject because the historical moment seemed to give me the poetic right to create people of higher awareness than the contemporary scene affords."

For decades, the contemporary scene in Egypt, indeed all over the Arab world, has needed the kind of awareness that Miller so forcefully dramatises in this play. That it was never performed anywhere in the Arab world before last week is perhaps understandable and quite logical: the fifties saw the rise of military dictatorships and as soon as they began to crumble, religious bigotry and fanaticism reared its ugly head. The recent hysterical reaction of the media against the so-called followers of the 'Satanic cult', or disciples of Satan, is a frightening reminder that the witch-trials of Salem may not be as safely distant and buried in the past as we would like to think. The current production of *The Crucible* at El-Hanager, however, was not a direct result of that deplorable mass hysteria.

The idea of the project started two years ago when Dr Huda Wasfi watched the play while on holiday in Europe. As soon as she came back she commissioned Mohamed Abul-Seoud to direct it. The production took two years to prepare and until last week, when it opened, it had not yet reached its final shape. Abul-Seoud speaks of this initial short five-day run as a series of open dress rehearsals intended to test the production on the public and frankly admits that he will need at least two or three more months to sift through the masses of material he crammed into the work, decide what to keep and what to chuck out, streamline the work generally and give it a better focus.

The general reaction to this first viewing was that the work was thrilling and provocative in its audio-visual conception, but far too long (over four hours), and somewhat rambling and diffuse. One could clearly see that the director had started with one project but somewhere along the line lost direction and strayed into another project. He had initially intended to follow in his treatment of Miller's text the same method and artistic strategies he had used with success in a previous production of Tawfiq El-Hakim's famous play *The Cave-Dwellers*. In that earlier production he had taken the play apart, discarded some scenes, added new elements and rearranged the whole thing to make it a vehicle for his own understanding and interpretation of the old legend. The result had been a rich and brilliant mosaic of poetry, dance and music.

In the present experiment, *The Crucible* proved a harder nut to crack. The initial movement and dance sequence (designed by Abul-Seoud with breathtaking lighting by Ihab Abdel-Latif), together with the series of slide-projections of paintings by Hieronymous Bosch, Breughel, Raphael and Magritte, among others, and the musical collage (which includes music by Prokofiev, Jean-Jacques Lemetre, René Aubry, the Kadash group, songs by Billie Holiday, as well as some Gregorian chants, church music and Scandinavian songs) suggests a frame of reference which is timeless and combines the legend of Faust, the temptation of Eve, John Fowles' novel *The Magus* and the Persian Zoroastrian dualistic religion. This exciting framework, however, soon pales out as we plunge headlong into the play and are treated to practically the whole of the first act of the play performed in a stark, naturalistic style that contrasts disconcertingly with the expressionistic mode of the opening sequence. It is true that some of the themes suggested in this sequence occasionally surface in the course of the show , but by the time we have reached the end of act two of Miller's slightly preachy and wordy text, they tend to look like pointless intrusions and useless, distracting addenda. Indeed, as the show progressed, the almost constant presence of Hani El-Mettinawi as the devil, in a black and red cape, in the background, watching the drama from a suspended high platform while coolly smoking a cigarette, became silly, childish and quite ridiculous.

What Abul-Seoud will need in the next few months, in the light of this trial run, is to look long and honestly at his work, make some difficult choices and ruthless excisions and decide finally whether he wants to do Miller' play as he wrote it or revise and reverse its traditional interpretation and the author's point of view. It is obvious from the production that Abul-Seoud is all out against any kind of witch hunt and has a real terror of religious fanaticism. But it is also clear that he has little sympathy with John Proctor's treatment of Abigail Williams, or with his wife's stuffy, puritanical, priggish and self-righteous attitude. To complicate matters further, he works into his production Miller's printed footnote on what happened to the real historical personages after the trials, particularly Elizabeth's marriage after the hanging of her husband John Proctor and Abigail's taking up prostitution as a career.

This vascillating, confused attitude to the characters affected the performances of the actors negatively so that they seemed to be fighting among themselves for the sympathy of the audience, rather than cooperating to make a coherent impact. This does not mean that there were not some excellent and quite powerful individual performances, particularly in the case of Nora Amin (as Abigail), Khaled El-Sawi (as Proctor), Mu'taza Abdel-Sabour (as Titupa), Hani El-Mettinawi (as Simon Magus and Lucifer), Mohamed Farouk (as the town's clown and doll-maker) and the vibrant Hamada Shousha who is fast developing into a versatile and charismatic actor.

But having said all this, I must hasten to add that Abul-Seoud's version of *The Crucible* (which, by the way, he gave the title *The Left Foot of Night* which in Egyptian lore refers to the approach of evil, entering a place with the left foot being a bad omen) is an ambitious and daring theatrical experiment, with magnificent potential. All it needs is some pruning to allow its intrinsic beauty to shine through. Luckily, Abul-Seoud is working on this right now and, hopefully when the work reopens in autumn, it will have shed all the debris and dead wood.

Music

Hail and farewell

David Blake on the darker side



Yasser El-Sirafi

Soloists of the Cairo symphony Orchestra II: Mohamed Hamdi, clarinet; Krassen Penev and Yasser El-Sirafi, violin; Alaa Khalil, viola; Dmitry Gudimav and Farid Bigashev, cello; Small Hall, Cairo Opera House, 22 April

Things do die but never music. There is such a lot of room for it in eternity: good, bad, weightless, spaceless, it is nobody's burden. This concert marked two anniversaries — a century on from Brahms' death, two centuries on from Schubert's birth. In whatever part of the happy lands the gods of music sit in assembly these two composers, Schubert and Brahms, will be pretty close to the right hand of the almighty.

We were given two string quintets — Schubert's *String Quintet in C major op 163* and Brahms' *Quintet for clarinet and strings in B minor op 115*. Both these composers are archangels, though they have little in common except their divinity. Brahms is a mystery — contradictory, secretive and unknowable. His aloofness is the greater part of his attraction. Schubert is no mystery at all. Brahms can be off putting, you can dislike him but must always respect him. At times he grows on you. Schubert does not have to do this. He is part of everyone who can hold a *tune*.

They both, however, possess a very dark side — Schubert the broken hearted in the *Winterreise* and Brahms in his 4th symphony. And in these two quintets it is the darker side, the shadow lands, that opens up before us as the music speeds on from deeps to vertiginous heights.

The soloists of the Cairo symphony Orchestra did the audience a service by presenting these two works with such style. Each player is a highly trained, experienced musician. Their sensitivity showed continuously as they passed through the mercilessly disquieting conclusions the music reaches. Each soloist merged into the tightly bound sense of chamber music unity demanded, yet when their moments of individual display came they shone with great clarity above the ensemble.

The quintet form offers a strange, almost unbalanced musical texture. It over balances the unity of four, and far outreaches three or two in its variety of musical possibility. It can reach almost orchestral richness.

First came the Schubert in C major, for two violins, viola and two cellos. From its first performance opinion has been pretty general that this quintet contains the very essence of Schubert. He had a gift for making tunes, melodies, whatever they be named, that flowed without hindrance or repetition. Water, rivers, brooks, mountain streams — always things flowing, gurgling and moving are used to capture the quality of his music. No other European composer ever approached the blend of total simplicity and profoundly fresh life his every bar possesses. He is *bel canto* itself, the *lied*, the song of songs, without a hint of staleness. No one else can rent the heart so easily. His songs need no operatic stage or help from anything but a piano. This work opens with solemnity, before announcing the first of its melodies, which proceed through endless changes of tempo and colour. Rhythm was a Schubert specialty and the movement ends with a jig. The next movement begins with gentle wayward melodies, long and swaying, which pound like a beating heart and hold the tune aloft. *Nothing is music so rapt*, detached and pure. Then, without any warning it gurgles to an end.

In the third part each instrument is given an aria. Violins sing to cellos which are commented upon by the lonely viola. They play numbers games — trios and quartets — witty but mostly sad. There are hymnal sections as three melts into four. Strange things go on amid the intimacy of five instruments, and then, as four moves into five, the piece changes into darkness and moves onto another plane. The rhythm becomes equine, softly pounding, the thud thud thud like the hooves of the horse of death of the *Erlkonig* coming along behind. This quintet shows a total economy of means, minimum notes but maximum drama. It is throat catching. What was out there behind us? We never know, because the composer of *Die forelle* cannot leave the scene which closes this perfect thing with perplexity in the air. It ends fortifyingly.

The Brahms quintet, as with the Schubert, presents the composer pure. The viola has gone, leaving the same four string instruments, supplemented by a clarinet. An exciting sound. The clarinet in this piece is used with complete virtuosity, like a jazz composition, improvised and newly formed. It is wrapped around by the strings, escapes, gets angry, growls then croons mockingly. It is a new take on an instrument with a pedigree.

Few clarinets sound as this one must, and Mohamed Hamdi played marvellously. With only a few strings around it is easy for the clarinet to sound pushy, though not with this player. He sang, let go in emotional outbursts, but never broke the quintet fabric.

The music is a morning threnody or elegy. Anyway, something great has passed, and the music turns almost in to a requiem. Can you bear Brahms' being deathly on a summer night in the middle of a rowdy public holiday? Can you survive him in huge mood, because Brahms can be very loomy?

This quintet may be long or short — is it even music? It is signed Brahms and is, therefore, music of a kind. It opens softly, like genuine listening music. The composer is still in the 19th century. Then it becomes feel music, tactile to an extraordinary degree as it enters a kind of heaven, rocking the clarinet gently. For a moment it is sunny, but soon glooms over. The clarinet is treated to virtuoso material and is as seraphic as we get in this lost world piece.

Where are we coming to rest? A great harbour, in blue white mid-day glory. We are home. Then suddenly, from nothing, over the sea, sweeping the harbour wall, comes a sea fog, obliterating everything in grey mass. The end, postlude, shutting down for now.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Jean Crotti (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 3 May.
New works under the title Pas Sages Comme Les Images.

Domestic Architecture in Islamic Egypt
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. Sun-Wed 8.30am-7pm, Thur 8.30am-5pm & Sat 12pm-5pm. Until 5 May.

Salah Zaki (Paintings)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc 1 May (8pm), 10am-10pm. Until 5 May.

Hussein Shariffe (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 2pm-9pm. Until 8 May.
New works under the title Innerspace.

Ann Parker
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 8 May.
These 34 colour photographs record the palette of mostly self-taught artists exemplifying the folk art of the Great Pilgrimage. Including are representations of the *Kaaba*, images of transportation, calligraphic inscriptions and pastoral renderings of Islamic worship.

Group Exhibition
Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 9 May.
Occupying the Rateb Seddiq, Nagui and Youth halls are the works of five artists, including Sami Keshk and Mohamed El-Tahawi.

Publications of the Greek Community in Egypt From 1853-1983
Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 18 Sidi El-Metwalli St, El-Attarin, Alexandria. Tel (03) 482 1598. Until 10 May.

Moustafa Ahmed (Paintings) & Fatma Refaat (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 10 May.

Nazih Rashid (Wood Carvings)
Doaia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Borg El-Ateba', Bab El-Louk. Tel 355 8367. Daily 12pm-9pm. Until 15 May.

Selim (Oil on Paper)
Akhnaton Gallery, 4a & 4b, Centre of Arts, El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. 4-22 May.
Works under the title "On Music and Musicians", "On Body and Nudes" and "On Signs and Symbols".

Romano Della Chiesa (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-8pm. 4-22 May.

Elfi Fröhlich (Paintings)
Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. 6-24 May.
Works under the title An Authentic Approach.

Zakaria El-Khanany (Glassworks), Kamel Ghandar (Watercolours) and Mohamed Oraby (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun. 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. 4-25 May.

Paul Rinaldi and Julie Caosh
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. 4-29 May.
New works by assistant professors of art in the Performing and Visual Arts Department.

Group Show
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. 5 May-4 June.
Fifteen artists exhibit their work under the title Art For All; including works by Farghali Abdel-Hafi, Mohamed Seleima, Jehane Raouf, Hussein El-Gebaly, Effat Hosny and Ghada Abu Ghazaleh.

Maquettes
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat. 9am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 5 June.
Research works by the students of the Architecture School of Nancy, currently in Cairo, on Bab Nasr.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Sweet Revenge
Japanese Information and Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 1 May, 6pm.
Directed by Katsumi Nishikawa (1978).

Spanish Films
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Adly St, Kodak Passage. Tel 395 2326.
4 May, 7.30pm: La Regenta (p. I), directed by Fernando Mendez Leite (1995).
7 May, 7.30pm: La Regenta (p. II), as above.

German Films
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877.
6 May, 7pm: Caspar David Friedrich, directed by Peter Schamoni (1986).
7 May, 7pm: Spring Symphony, directed by Peter Schamoni (1983).

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Samaka Wa Arba' Qoroush (A Fish and Four Sharks)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Emra'a Wa Khamas Regal (A Woman and Five Men)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit And Adila II)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Imra'a Fawq El-Qemma (A Woman At The Top)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.



Salah Zaki

Star Wars
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The First Wives Club
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

The Phantom
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

Dante's Peak
El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.

Last Dance
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Jerry Maguire
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Satan's Treasure
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Craft
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

French Kiss
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Glimmer Man
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

A Low Down Dirty Shame
Karim I, as above. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

MUSIC

The Marriage of Figaro
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 1, 2 & 4 May, 8pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Company.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 1 May, 8pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Conservatoire Youth Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 2 May, 8pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 3 May, 8pm.
The orchestra, along with soloists Christian Altenburger (violin) and Franz Bartolomey (cello), conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi, perform selections from Brahms.

Violin Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 4 May, 8pm.
Hassan Sharara performs.

Academy of Arts Orchestra
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 6 May, 8pm.
The orchestra will perform works by Atteya Sharara and other composers.

Young Talents on Concert
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 6 May, 8pm.
The string department of the Conservatoire, directed by Prof Nahed Zikry, perform.

DANCE

Woyzeck
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Until 5 May, 8pm.
A dance theatre performance by Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thöny, based on the play by Georg Büchner, with music by René Aubry; the dancers and actors are Ahmed Abdel-Aziz, Reem Hegab, Mohamed Shafik and Essam Said.

THEATRE

The Arabian Nights
Fountain Area, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 4 May, 8pm.
Storytelling in English by Sherine El-Ansary.

Sur Les Rimes Du Nil
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 5 & 6 May, 8pm.
A bilingual performance based on the texts of Jacques Prévert and Salah Jahine.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 10pm.
Starring Salah El-Saadani, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Balouza Fil Ballon (Balouza at the Balloon)
Balloon Theatre, Corniche El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily 9pm.

Messa' El-Kheir Ya Masr (Good Evening Egypt)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 9pm.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell, Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9pm.

El-Mar'a Allati Tokallem Nafsoha Kathiran (The Woman Who Speaks To Herself Too Much)
Zaki Tolaimat Hall, El-Tali'a Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 937 948. Daily 9pm.

El-Mahzala (The Disgrace)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.

LECTURES

The Rights of Women Workers In The Light of The New Unified Labour Law
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 303 1514. 4 May, 7pm.
The lecture, in Arabic, is by Dr Ahmed Hassan El-Borai, professor of Social Law at Cairo University, Professor Aisha Abdel-Hadi, member of the Shura Council and Dr Abdel-Moneim Bekhit, deputy chairman of the Egyptian Industries Federation.

Applying Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis to Text Analysis for Actors
Blue Room, Greek Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 5 May, 4pm.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Xavier Puigmarti

SCENES from Nubia is the title of a group exhibition currently on show at **Picasso Gallery**. The exhibition includes works by **Ibrahim Ghazala, Mohamed Heggi, Abdel-Ghani Aboul-Enein, Omar Abdel-Dhaher, Salwa Halim, Zeinab El-Segeini, Tad, Hussein Bicar** and **Haqqi El-Tahhan**.

The Centre for Arts, Zamalek hosts mixed media paintings, 35 in all, by **Naima El-Sheshini**. Landscapes and still-lifes are abstracted to points, to lines of daring colour melting, embracing.

Paintings, 27 in all, by **Xavier Puigmarti** are on exhibit at **Mashrabiya Gallery**. Sketch-like in execution, these seem to be inspired largely by pre-historic cave drawings and experiment in interesting ways with background and texture.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

De-gendering the princess

The diversity of new titles being published for children does not mask the problems that publishers face in targetting a young audience. **Hala Halim** examines the ups and downs of publishing for children

Time there was when children's books were re-tellings of tales from *The Thousand and One Nights* or Arabic adaptations of Western fairy tales and Shakespearean plays abridged until they were no longer recognisable. It is no more so. Happily, the choice is growing by the day, the illustrations are in more colours than the rainbow and the princesses — when there are princesses — fret over the environment. But is the picture all that rosy? When it comes to producing and selling children's books not all publishers would agree.

That there is far greater diversity in the Egyptian children's library and that prospects are opening up for the trade cannot to be doubted. Commercial publishing houses like Dar El-Shorouq (established in 1968) have massively expanded their children's series. Arab publishers specialising in books for children and teenagers have emerged — the first being Dar Al-Fatta Al-Arabi (1974). Home grown English-language fiction and non-fiction titles have come out from Elias Modern Publishing House (established in 1913) and, more recent and exclusively for children, from Hoopoe Books. Meanwhile, the national campaign of "Reading for All", under Mrs Mubarak's patronage, has turned children's literature into a prominent issue. The thirteenth round of the Cairo International Children's Book Fair, organised by the General Egyptian Book Organisation (GEBO), was held last November. This April, a number of Egyptian publishers participated in the Bologna children's book fair where some of them have made inroads with European publishers and distributors.

"Economic conditions are such that book publishing, in general, has become a problem, let alone children's books which require quality paper, attractive illustrations in colour and preferably hardcovers," says Ahmed El-Ziadi director of publishing at Dar El-Shorouq. For Laura Kfoury, managing director of Elias Modern Publishing House, the first print run of any children's book is not profitable, since the high expenses incurred in illustrating the texts, in advertising the books and attending international fairs is such that should it be calculated in the price, the product would be priced out of the market. Titles only begin to show a profit at the second, sometimes third reprint. Kfoury also complains that book shops do very little to actively promote titles aimed specifically at children. "Their displays are very bad. We send people to arrange displays, but when they go back a month later, they find everything changed." While she does not attribute this to the prejudiced belief that children's books are a luxury, she finds that it does rather reflect a lack of professionalism.

The predominantly Palestinian Dar Al-Fatta Al-Arabi "works almost like an NGO rather than a commercial house as the 20 shareholders donated the money and wanted to keep it almost non-profit" and operates a policy of reduced prices in Egypt, the Sudan and Yemen, explains Hasna Miqdashi, and yet, sales in Egypt are outstripped by returns. For "despite the subsidy we offer, children's books are expensive" and, adds Miqdashi, distribution is handled by big commercial distributors who are not always the ideal channel. Among the strategies employed by Dar Al-Fatta to eschew that problem is to approach wealthy Arabs to sponsor the donation of a collection to public and school libraries which would then carry their name.

Over thirteen years after the Cairo International Children's Book Fair was established, to what extent has the event helped bring the books to their target reader? All publishers spoken to agree that their sales of children's books at the — general — Cairo book fair are far bigger than at the fair devoted to children. El-Ziadi puts part of the blame on the fact that the two events are not sufficiently well-spaced on the calendar: the children's fair taking place in November and the general one usually in January. Since children's books are also available at the general fair, parents prefer to make one all-purpose trip. El-Ziadi feels that more publicity should precede the children's fair and a more concerted effort should be made to organise school trips to fair. Samir Saad, director of both fairs, does not take well to the latter criticism. The children's fair, he says, allocates special days for different educational zones in Greater Cairo, though he acknowledges that trips from schools in the provinces are left up to the local authorities' own organisational initiative.

To Laura Kfoury of Elias Modern Publishing House, the children's fair is an important event for the children themselves and for teachers and libraries. But as an outlet, she explains, this fair is only really geared towards individual sales while deals with international distributors are made at the general fair, which is a far more international event than its children's counterpart.

"I don't know how important [the children's fair] is; I'm ambivalent about it. If I'm to assess it commercially, I'd say more children's books sell at the general fair than at the children's fair — is it a question of pocket money, is it that they have little time because they've just come from school? No one has made a study of it," offers Miqdashi. Prefacing her words with the reservation that comparing the Cairo children's fair with that of Bologna would be unfair, Miqdashi nevertheless commends the fact that at the latter, children participate in the event and adjudicate certain awards. Likewise, she feels that GEBO should encourage artists and writers working in the field to participate in developing the children's fair and to choose a theme for the event rather than depend on bureaucrats.

Economic problems and distribution aside, a number of alternative channels for books to reach children — particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds — are beginning to open up. Targeting this particular group, the Integrated Care Society (ICS), an NGO patronised by Mrs Mubarak, launched the "portable library", which tours urban slum areas and villages, explains Dr Aida Guindi, a member of the executive board of the ICS. Gradually, with the expansion of the society's remit to include "urban and rural development, children and women's health, services for disabled children, among other things", ICS started establishing children's book centres, of which there are some 46 today.



Aziza, the downtrodden princess as depicted by Helmi El-Touni

The ICS book centres, together with cultural palace and school libraries, now requisition huge quantities of children's books, which goes some way towards covering publishing expenses and places the literature in the hands of its most needy readers explains El-Ziadi of El-Shorouq, whose words are corroborated by Elias and Dar Al-Fatta.

"Mrs Mubarak has been very consistent and conscientious in her efforts; she started out back in the late '70s... [then] began the ICS and Reading for All programme. Now, in many Arab countries, people are trying to imitate her — which is a good thing. There is no doubt that she's made an impact and gained a lot of positive response, shedding light on the importance of children's culture and literature," says Miqdashi. She does, however, feel that what has been accomplished is a nucleus and that more libraries are needed, since the ones established can cater, at the very most, she estimates, for 50,000 children.

But given that there is a market out there as wide as the Arab world, how does this work to support Egyptian production of literature for children and young people? Elias's English-language fiction and non-fiction series is finding a market in North Africa and the Middle-East in general, asserts Kfoury. But perhaps Elias' experience is not representative of the problems other publishers have occasionally met with when marketing their books in the Arab world. Whether fiction or non-fiction, Elias' beautifully produced books are informed by a coherent and consciously politically correct, though never heavy-handed or patronising, approach to subject matter. Each of the three titles in the fiction series — all written by Susan Shenouda and featuring exquisitely humorous illustrations by Golo — bring together a magical encounter between a modern Egyptian child and an Ancient Egyptian one, yielding many historical and environmental insights. Likewise, the non-fiction series, published in French as well as English in co-operation with Hoopoe Books, brings thoroughly educational and stimulatingly written volumes on such subjects as wildlife, bread and coffee. But given that these books are not in Arabic (projects, says Kfoury, are afoot to rewrite one of the stories in Arabic) it can be argued that they are not dependent for their survival on the political, economic and ideological vicissitudes of the Arab market.

Both economic and political changes in the Arab world have taken their toll on publishers of Arabic books for the young.

"We used to have a big market in Iraq and Kuwait. But after the Gulf War, all that finished," says El-Ziadi of Dar El-Shorouq, "and now we depend on the local market." Dar El-Shorouq, eclectic, commercial and liberally Islamist, primarily publishes books for the adult market, and thus could weather the sea-change. Harder hit was the "Pan-Arab" Dar Al-Fatta Al-Arabi with its policy of subsidising books for Egyptian, Sudanese and Yemeni markets and making profits in petro-dollar countries. The losses of the publishing house during and after the Gulf War, explains Miqdashi, were huge. Iraqi children are out and the Kuwaiti market is not what it used to be. Currently going through an impasse, Dar Al-Fatta may be moving to, or at least opening a branch in Gaza — a move Miqdashi is certain will revitalise the publishing house. If some of the political messages coded in the books will change, Miqdashi says she is "pragmatic about it".

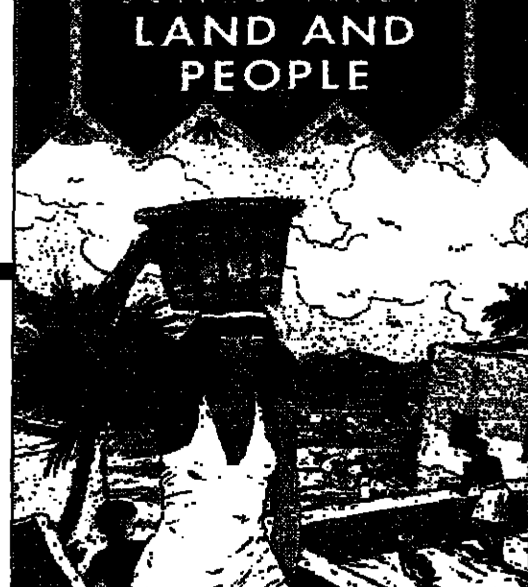
Ideological factors, too, play a part in determining which Egyptian books are distributed in the Gulf. "We deal with 21 different censors with 21 different mentalities", says El-Ziadi. Though more often than not books are given the laisser passer, he says, the bans on certain books are often random and "a matter of the individual censor's efforts". He mentions Ragi Enayat's *Al-Amira Al-Mazlouma* (The Downtrodden Princess), which was not allowed into Saudi Arabia. Here, Enayat takes the features of a timeless, archetypal tale and gives them a modern twist. The tale has for its heroine princess Aziza who is at one with nature, believes in political dialogue and is ultimately vindicated in her passive resistance to the reign of her tyrannical, war-like uncle, King Safwan. But El-Ziadi does not think the content of the tale was even considered prior to the ban: the very title, he says, put paid to its chances.

Considering another Saudi ban on a Dar Al-Fatta title also involving a princess, Miqdashi goes further in her interpretation. The story in question is *Al-Qandil Al-Saghir* (The Small Lantern), written and illustrated by the late Palestinian novelist Ghassan Kanafani. Here a — nameless — princess is put to a riddle-like test of valour she must pass if she is to prove worthy of the throne left empty after her father's death: namely, to bring the sun into the palace. The solution involves tearing down the perimeter walls of the palace, thus allowing all the inhabitants of the land to gather with their lanterns at night and the sun to light up the palace by day — a pro-democracy, pro-woman parable. "I think the ban was because the princess becomes a queen, so there's a gender issue involved, and also because of prejudice against women's political participation", speculates Miqdashi. She does add, though, that this was an isolated instance and that Dar Al-Fatta books usually cross all borders.

Other Cairo-based publishers would have no fears of being banned from lucrative petro-dollar markets. Among these is Safeer which advertised, during Ramadan TV prime-time, what is probably a first in the Arab world: a pictorial Arabic-English, English Arabic dictionary for children (also available from and into other European languages). The *Safeer Illustrated Dictionary* is not likely to be subject to gender bans. There are 4,000 entries in the dictionary. In all entries where women figure, they are portrayed wearing the veil. Likewise, the vast majority of little girls have their hair covered. Most verbs are illustrated by images of men or boys — with such exceptions as *'aahada ilayhi* (to entrust), which shows one veiled woman entrusting a swathed child to another, *khata* (to sew) and *hamasa* (to whisper), which shows two girls carrying out the action.

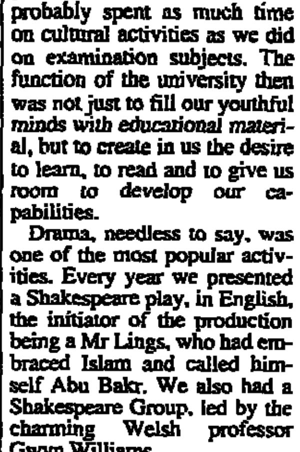
Asked what in her opinion constituted the most significant obstacles to the publishing of children's books in Egypt, Dr Nadia El-Kholi is hard put to single out specific problems. Associate professor of English Literature, Cairo University, El-Kholi has carried out extensive comparative studies of children's literature and is consultant on the subject at the Integrated Care Society, where she is part of the critics' committee evaluating recent publications. To El-Kholi, the virtual absence of critical and academic interest in children's books has had a detrimental effect. It is mostly this dearth, she argues, that makes for the lack of quality control in publications that specifically target the young — evidenced in the plagiarism of works, in the mis-targeting of texts to age groups, the heavy-handed moralising, the male-chauvinist messages, and many other problems. At least until sociologists, psychologists and literary critics start taking children's literature seriously, she will probably continue to find that, by and large, "the situation is depressing."





Entries from the *Safeer Illustrated Dictionary*; a title from the fiction series of Elias Modern Publishing House; Dar Al-Fatta Al-Arabi's *Min Al-Qalb Lil-Qalb* (Heart to Heart), written by Fouad Haddad and illustrated by Mohieddin El-Labbad

Plain Talk



I still remember my university years which lasted from the 1940s to the early 1950s. I was a student in the English Section of the Faculty of Arts of the then Fouad I University. I remember those years with affection and from time to time I brood over them nostalgically. The university during those years was what a university really ought to be. It was not just a seat of learning but also a powerhouse of culture. We probably spent as much time on cultural activities as we did on examination subjects. The function of the university then was not just to fill our youthful minds with educational material, but to create in us the desire to learn, to read and to give us room to develop our capabilities.

Drama, needless to say, was one of the most popular activities. Every year we presented a Shakespeare play, in English, the initiator of the production being a Mr Lings, who had embraced Islam and called himself Abu Bakr. We also had a Shakespeare Group, led by the charming Welsh professor Gwyn Williams.

Such was the intellectual life during our university years. The situation now is quite different, but I will not get into this. I am mentioning my student experience because I have just received a publication issued by the American University in Cairo, which reminded me of those golden days. I am not trying to propagandise. It is simply that I believe the AUC, as it has come to be called, has contributed greatly towards strengthening the cultural arena in Egypt.

A cursory look at the programme of cultural activities, organised by the Public Relations Department, would show us their extent and diversity. Two activities which stand out are their Model Arab League and Model United Nations. They are wonderful opportunities to train the young for the world of international relations and to teach them the proper methods of political discourse. It was wonderful watching young men and women playing the roles of national representatives, a role which they had to study and perfect.

The *AUC Today* magazine reminded me of the magazine we used to publish for the English Section back in the late forties and early fifties. It was called *ESFAM — the English Section, Faculty of Arts Magazine* — of which I was the editor-in-chief for the four years I spent in the section. We published articles and stories by students — at the time Ali El-Ra'ei and No'man Ashour were colleagues and regular contributors — and also poems by some of our lecturers, such as Terence Tiller and Bernard Spencer, who were also leading English poets.

Going through the current issue of *AUC Today* I was impressed by its quality both of production and content. One specific article attracted my attention. It is about the restoration of Beyt El-Suhaimy. The house has been undergoing extensive restoration for the last two years. With the assistance of, according to the article, a $3 million grant from the Arab Fund, Dr Asaad Nadim family hopes to complete the project by next year.

This is a move which all who value the national heritage and who deplore the state of most of our old buildings must welcome. It is a special joy for us, at the *Weekly*, since we initiated a campaign for the saving and preservation of our architectural heritage. Details of the project are given in the article but, of course, there is other interesting and informative material that make the magazine well worth reading.

Mursi Saad El-Din

An engaging history

The Stories of the Caliphs: the Early Rulers of Islam, text Denys Johnson-Davies, illustations Abdel-Wahab Bilal. Cairo: Hoopoe Books, 1997
The Battles of the Prophet Muhammad, text Denys Johnson-Davies, illustations Ashraf Abdel-Azim. Cairo: Hoopoe Books, 1997
The Pharaohs, text Salima Ikram, illustations Salah Hassab. Cairo: Hoopoe Books, 1997
Land and People, text Salima Ikram, illustations Salah Hassab. Cairo: Hoopoe Books, 1997

Following Julie Andrews' advice that to start at the very beginning is a very good place to start, these books begin with the very genesis of Egyptian history and Herodotus' famous maxim that Egypt is the gift of the Nile, the quirky Nile which contrary to river custom flows from south to north. Not surprisingly, a simple lesson in geography and topography becomes an excellent inroad into history: ancient Egyptian and Islamic. The choice raises the inescapable question: will all the gaps eventually be filled? Replete with maps, excellent photos and colourful illustrations, this series brought out by Hoopoe Books, brings to life many diverse aspects of Egyptian heritage.

A very timely project, these books are made to dazzle any child. Small in size, they are elegantly bound and printed, as well as meticulously proof-read. These slim volumes are handsome enough for a birthday present, light enough to take on a trip and, most importantly, attractive enough to appeal to children with a limited concentration span.

Beyond the mechanics and aesthetics of forms, the series is pedagogically sound. Written by well-known authorities: Egyptologist Salima Ikram and leading translator Denys Johnson-Davies, they serve a dual educational purpose; they teach English as well as history. The language is polished, idiomatic, accessibly eloquent and semantically rich. The choice of historical information, always with a touch of human interest in mind, is to be highly commended. Whether the book soars over the feats of Islamic leaders or concerns itself with the trivia of life, the tone is never supercilious or didactic but quietly conversational, a fact which breaks the remoteness of history and which makes the world of the ancients surprisingly ingratiating.

Ostensibly children's books, they are certain to appeal to any age group and not just to the adult who falls into the category of parent or teacher. The information may be simple but it is not simplistic. It might surprise most of us to learn that the high and mighty pharaoh could condescend and receive the following advice:

"Don't be evil, kindness is good.
Make your memorial last through love of you,
Respect your nobles and care for your people.
Strengthen your borders, your frontier patrols.
Speak truth in your house
So that the officials of your kingdom respect you.
Do justice, then you endure on earth.
Calm the weeper, do not oppress people.
Beware of punishing unjustly,
Thus will the land be well-ordered!"

Equally interesting is the fact that chicken, rice and tomatoes were unknown in ancient Egypt. The battles of wit which took place between the Caliphs and their subjects in an atmosphere of almost anachronistic democracy are instructive for any adult. And who would not want to find out about the woman who vowed to eat the liver of her enemy?

Full of such thought-provoking data, the books are meant to be complementary and prismatic — inevitably with some overlap of information, an excusable liability. The focus may shift from *Land and People* to *The Pharaohs*, or from *The Battles of the Prophet Muhammad* to *Stories of the Caliphs*. They could be read in order or at random, at one shot or in several sittings.

The presentation of the data is further enhanced by pithy captions, colourful insets and an occasional question. The glossary, index and publishing information are certain to teach a child respect for the printed word at an early age.

The anecdotal nature of the narrative will make the books excellent bed-time stories; not only are they less flighty than fairy tales but certainly more cultivating of a sense of national identity.

Books which animate history are a real find, and when both the books and the history are indigenous one feels doubly proud. Geared towards young anglophones of this country, these books will definitely cross the border and became some of the best ambassadors Egypt could employ. It takes a project like this to draw children away from a world that has been taken over by videos and computers back into the cosy world of books once more.

Reviewed by Nazek Fahmy

Gracious living

Bernard Maury, head of the Restoration Mission established under the auspices of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, speaks to Fayza Hassan about the restoration of two private houses of 18th century Cairo

The mention of Islamic Cairo usually brings to mind images of mosques, palaces, *madrasas and* public baths. Rarely are private dwelling remembered. This lack of interest in domestic architecture has been partly responsible for the disappearance of a large number of 17th and 18th century private houses which, according to the description of historians and travellers of the period, would have received at least an honourable mention in the list of buildings which make up our national architectural heritage.

In the *Description de l'Egypte* (1803-1828) the savants accompanying the Napoleonic expedition described 600 private dwellings dating from the Mameluke period, noting their particular architecture and the beauty of their woodwork. In 1933, the official count for these dwellings (as per E. Pauty's "Inventory of houses and palaces of the Islamic period"), stood at 70; by 1970, only 29 were still listed. The others had been progressively abandoned or had fallen victim to the demographic explosion and the relentless drive towards urban modernisation.

In 1970, the CNRS (Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques), attached to the Social Science section of the *French Ministry of Foreign* Affairs, launched a project in cooperation with the IFAO (Institut Français d'Archeologie Orientale) which was to be implemented by the Mission d'Etudes Scientifiques des Palais et Maisons du Caire et de Rosette du XIV au XVIIIème Siècle (Scientific study mission of the 14th to 18th century palaces and houses of Cairo *and Rosetta*) and the *Egyptian Antiquities* Organisation (EAO).

In the 1980s, the project was transformed at the initiative of Ahmed Qadri, then head of the EAO (now called, the Supreme Council of Antiquities), into a programme of preservation and restoration, says Bernard Maury, architect-in-chief of the Scientific Mission. The new functions of the mission were inaugurated with the decision to restore one of the bourgeois houses still in existence, that of El-Harawi, built in 1731 and situated near the Al-Azhar Mosque. The work started in 1986 and was completed in 1993.

"The restoration work," says Maury, "was conducted with great respect not only for the original aspect of the building, but also for the building materials and methods used at the time of construction."

Basically, says Maury, the team was faced with three main problems when restoring this particular dwelling: the necessity of using quality materials, the competence (or lack thereof) of *the workers and, finally, funding.*

When dealing with monuments of historical importance, it is essential that the materials and techniques used in the restoration exactly match the original. "With this principle in mind, we had to overcome several difficulties, but when we did, our findings became part the wealth of knowledge to be used in future works of this nature," says Maury. "The stone used in previous restorations, known as Helwan stone since it is taken from the quarries of Helwan, was found too soft and permeable, lacking the qualities of the stones extracted in the past from the now closed quarries of El-Gabal El-Ahmar." Stones from old buildings being demolished were recuperated and used in the consolidation of the foundations, so successfully that the same process was later adopted by the EOA in the restoration of Sitt Wasila's house nearby.

A similar problem arose in connection with the woodwork repairs. "Pitch pine," says Maury, had been used originally to make the ceilings. To match it, old beams were purchased and *carved to replace the damaged parts, which often* involved extensive sections of the ceiling. "In the same spirit, cement was completely discarded and the old use of lime mortar revived." The original mortar was made of a mixture of lime and *qosr mel* (ashes resulting from burning coal and refuse used to heat the water for the public baths). Today, however, *qosr mel* is replaced by sand or red brick dust.

Maury adds that a number of Egyptian artisans were recruited and an attempt to reintroduce them to the building techniques of their ancestors was initiated. This experiment yielded encouraging results, leading to the idea of creating a body of skilled Egyptian construction workers and artisans trained in the use of old techniques, who will be able to contribute in the future to restorations with a minimum of intervention on the part of foreign experts. This, in turn, will considerably reduce the cost of such enterprises.

In the case of the El-Harawi house, Egypt financed the purchase of construction materials *and the wages of local manpower, explains Maury.* This represents a considerable outlay. Some specialised work, which Egypt was unable to include in the allocated budget, was completed with the help of a number of foreign private companies, which extended free expertise or financial contributions, and sometimes both.

According to Maury, the most exacting part of the work *was the restoration of the woodwork* and the painted ceilings. "For the woodwork, we relied on the expertise of the Tour de France artisans who, with a small team of local specialised carpenters, did a remarkable job of repairing ceilings, doors, built-in niches and cupboards and other wooden fixtures. The Centre Regional d'Etudes et de Traitement des Oeuvres d'Art (*Regional Centre for the Study* and Treatment of Works of Art) in Avignon effected the restoration of the painted ceilings."

Having completed the restoration of the house of El-Harawi, the Franco-Egyptian "salvage mission" extended its scope, this time targeting an unusual heirloom, Beit El-Sennari. "[A] protocol, signed at the end of 1994, pledged [the] par*ticipation of [Egypt and France, as well as the* UNESCO], and attested to their common wish to restore this monument, whose inauguration is to take place in 1998, writes Maury, in *Aujourd'hui L'Egypte* (31 November 1995).

Situated on the southern periphery of the old Fatimid city, the gracious house of Ibrahim Kathhuda Al-Sinnari was built towards the end of *18th century. It is situated in a little cul-de-sac* in Sayeda Zeinab, known as Zuqaq Monge or Monge alley, in a part of the city which is now totally transformed by the informal urban sprawl and the erection of cheap modern housing units. Pascal Coste, an architect from Marseilles, however, left a totally different description of the area, as he saw it when he visited Cairo in 1837. "Summer houses were established alongside the canal [the *Khalig*], among gardens planted with vines, date-palms, orange, lemon and banana trees. People stayed there up until November, enjoying the freshness of the waters, the perfume of the plants and flowers." (In *Aujourd'hui L'Egypte*).

After the *Khalig* was filled and replaced by Port Said Street, the area quickly deteriorated. Luckily, writes Maury, El-Sennari's house survived, more fortunate than its neighbours, which succumbed to the wrecking ball of the developers.

Details on the house were preserved thanks to the historical research of Georges Legrain, who *recounted, in 1925, how this particular dwelling* and two neighbouring others were chosen to accommodate the French expedition's scientists, eventually becoming the headquarters of the first Instiut d'Egypte.

The owner of the El-Sennari house is known to us today through the chronicle of El-Jabarti, who wrote that, around 1780, "a black-skinned Berber, a native of Dongola, left his country of origin and came to Mansoura where he became a porter, under the name of Ibrahim El-Aswad. As most Berbers today, Ibrahim soon learned to read and, procuring for himself some treatises on occult science, he wasted no time in gaining a certain reputation for predicting the future and writing talismans."

Eventually Ibrahim won the confidence of several powerful Mamelukes. A master of intrigue, he was skillful at playing off one *emir* against the other, until he finally realised his dream, which was to be totally accepted and trusted by Murad Bey.

Thanks to the generosity of his patron, who *lavished on him riches and honours, Ibrahim* (now Katkhuda) El-Sennari "was soon in possession of rents and revenues and built himself a house on which he spent considerable sums, in El-Nasriya quarter. Some other favourites of Murad Bey had built their palaces, close to that of Ibrahim El-Sennari. At the entrance of the narrow street which led to it, on the right, was the house of Qassem Bey Abu Seif, a great lover of gardens, on the left Hassan El-Kashef the Circassian had just finished his, the fruit of his excessive plundering."

After Murad Bey's army was defeated at Imbaba, says Maury, Bonaparte marched into Cairo through the gate of Bab El-Futuh. The houses of the three Mamelukes of El-Nasriya were "discovered" by Monge, Bertholet and Cafarelli and were requisitioned by Bonaparte for his savants, as were many other Mamelukes' houses and palaces.

"The house," writes Maury, "has scarcely changed since its foundation, if one refers to the drawings and plans made by Bonaparte's savants. One can be equally grateful for the actions of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe, who classified the house in 1922, and undertook restoration work with respect for the original character of the place," he adds.

A *major seepage of underground* water, however, had plagued the house since the '50s, damaging the floors and foundations of the walls at ground level. The French mission had the opportunity to study the problem in detail in 1995 and, 'using the advice and the know-how of engineers working on the Cairo Metro, as well as securing the participation of the Centre for Ar*cheological Engineering at Cairo University,*" managed to determine its origins: drinking water from leaks in dilapidated pipes, creating underground channels. The source of the problem, which plagues the whole of Cairo, was the water distribution system as a whole.

Maury waxes lyrical on the remedy he finally plumped for, with great success: "It involved reestablishing the original ground-level of the house, by removing 500 cubic metres of earth around its base. A draining girdle was then placed along the perimetre of the house at a depth of between 80 centimetres and one metre, below ground level, thus creating a barrier against the water outside. A network of drainage *ditches was created inside the house, which* functioned according to the principle of gravity, allowing the water to flow through the ditches into a tank which in turn spilled into the city drainage system. As a security measure, automatic pumps were sometimes used to direct the waters to a secondary system when the city drains became overloaded."

Once the decision to start work on El-Sennari house had been made, it was important to act quickly, says Maury, who hates being bogged down by details. "We appealed to the generosity of French firms operating in Cairo and willing to contribute to saving Egypt's heritage. The firm of SGE-Campenon Bernard took on the entire costs of the drainage operations, which was started in mid-June and finished in September. The restoration work began a few weeks later." The task ahead is still colossal, he says, pointing to the stones at the bottom of the wall, each of which is carefully removed, dried and then refitted with lime-mortar. "But, with adequate funds, we hope to be up to the challenge and complete the work in the delays agreed upon."

Al-Ahram Weekly was invited on a guided grand tour of Beit El-Sennari by Maury, who detailed some of the classical features of the house, such as the ground floor reception areas — courtyard, *maq'ad* (open loggia), and *qa'a* (reception room). Maury also pointed out the more unusual and noteworthy features, for example the great door in sculpted stone, dominated by a grand corbelled *mashrabiya*, and the magnificent woodwork of the *mashrabiya* screen separating a small *iwan* (open sitting room) from the rest of the *qa'a*, which itself is covered by a splendid coffered ceiling featuring in its middle a carved wooden lantern.

Another peculiarity is an enormous *malqaf* or wind-catcher placed on the top floor in the little *iwan*. "Opening to the sky, it brought in the fresh northerly breeze in the evening and directed it to the interior of the *qa'a*, chasing out the hot air — by its difference in density — from other openings and the central lantern," says Maury.

The upper floors present serious problems, such as entire wall panels which may require reconstruction. That, combined with the damages caused by half a century of water seepage, sometimes gives Maury the impression of trying to hold a sand castle together. He is, however, rather optimistic as to the outcome of his enterprise.

And what will El-Sennari house be used for once restoration is completed? "It was suggested that we create a Bonaparte Museum here and the idea was studied seriously at one point, but nothing came of it. Besides, there are other projects which are being studied and are at least equally as attractive."

Why not an international school of restoration? "Why not?" agrees Maury. "We have enough space for a large school, which could accommodate students on two levels, architects and artisans interested in restoration."

Maury thinks that it is important to come to a decision before the work is completed, because it is much easier at this stage, he says, to include many of the features — wiring, electrical outlets, display and audio facilities, etc... — necessary to the specific function for which the house is intended. But whatever Beit El-Sennari is ultimately used for, it stands testimony to the splendour of 18th century domestic Cairene architecture.



The discreet charm of the bourgeoisie: Beit El-Sennari, Monge Alley *photo: Amr Gamal*



The day of the iguana

When my second daughter was growing up, I took some time off work. I thoroughly enjoyed the mornings with her, alone in the house. With the men gone to work and the older children at school, the little suburb seemed to go back to sleep for a few hours, before a renewed flurry of activity announced the return of the other members of the neighbourhood's households.

I used to make myself a fresh cup of coffee, then take the baby out of her crib and, seating her on her low chair in the kitchen, let her eat her breakfast by herself while I lazily perused the previous day's newspapers. Once full, she usually proceeded to paint the walls with the rest of her porridge. The kitchen was large and sunny, with a glass door opening onto our untidy backyard. From where I lounged, I could observe the long blades of uncut grass, still wet from the morning dew, lazily dancing in the breeze. According to the season, our next door neighbour's pumpkins or passion fruits would cascade over our fence. At these moments, I would idly tell myself that I, too, should be planting something.

Sometimes, I would stop reading and observe the baby as she painstakingly tried to introduce a particularly reluctant blob of cereal into one of the numerous new holes she constantly discovered while crawling around. She licked her fingers and smacked her lips after each unsuccessful trial.

On several occasions, I saw her interrupt her labour, her grubby little fist suspended in mid-air, stare towards the garden and wink repeatedly. After a while, she would turn her attention once more to the task at hand. At first, this did not strike me as particularly unusual. She was probably telling herself a story, I thought, but after I had witnessed this little trick several mornings in a row, I became intrigued.

"Why are you winking?" I asked. She just looked at me then looked away. I realised that she did not know the word. It was not part of her familiar vocabulary. No one winked in the Golden Books, and winking was certainly not a common practice in our family. I therefore mimicked "wink" for her. She giggled. "Like my fuwend," she gurgled, trying to catch my lid with her sticky fingers.

Her friend Brendan was my neighbour's son. His mother was an artist. Whenever the little boy got in the way of her bouts of creativity, she sent him out to play. Brendan would then appear at our back door, sulkily sucking his thumb, stark naked. The first time I saw him, my Oriental self was slightly shocked, although I could fully appreciate the practical advantages of such a get-up. Later, I got used to it and when my daughter insisted on shedding her diapers to imitate him, I would just drag the inflatable pool out and let them splash about in the sun.

Now, however, it was a different story. If Brendan had taken to winking, maybe I should watch him more closely. Could a two-year-old develop lecherous tendencies? And if so, what was I supposed to do? I looked up. There was no one in the garden. "Where is your friend?" I asked, a little puzzled. She pointed, then winked several times vigorously. The backyard was quite empty, devoid even of the neighbour's invading attempts at horticulture. Suddenly I gasped.

There, half hidden in the long grass, stood the strangest creature, observing us intently. It looked like a young crocodile in the process of mutating into a dragon. It had not managed to grow wings yet, I noticed, a detail I found slightly reassuring. It was totally still. I tried to convince myself that it was one of the hideous objects with which many of our neighbours of undistinguished taste decorated their gardens. One of my friends may have placed it in my backyard as a practical joke. For some reason, however, I knew that this was a real thing, that it was alive. The creature confirmed my impression by letting its wrinkled eyelid quickly drop over its black, beady eye. This is why my daughter had been winking.

I hurriedly tried to remember what I knew about crocodiles and/or dragons. Nothing that I knew was of practical use. And what if Brendan decided to come and play? If the creature snatched the little boy, how could I explain his disappearance?

Dragging my daughter firmly away from the door, I ran to the phone to call the one neighbour whose telephone number I still remembered in my confusion. "Robyn," I whispered, out of breath, "there is a monster in my backyard." There was silence at the other end of the line, then: "Does he have a gun?" Robyn asked cautiously. "It is not that kind of monster," I said quickly, "it is green and has spiky humps on its back." More silence followed. Robyn must have gone to her window, from which vantage point she could observe my backyard.

"It is an iguana, silly," she said finally. "Leave it alone, it brings good luck." Although I had doubts about the creature having the same powers as a four-leaf clover, I certainly had no aggressive intentions towards it. In the long run, I even grew used to seeing it fixedly observing us in the mornings, and I eventually stopped paying it any attention. Whenever one of the children was ill, however, I caught myself on several occasions looking out for our iguana and, when I saw the rocky shape in the grass, I always felt reassured.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Baked chicken with yoghurt

Ingredients:

Two medium chickens
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
One tsp. crushed garlic
Two cartons of plain yoghurt
1/2 cup corn oil
Salt + pepper + sweet paprika + *summaq*

Method:

Cut the chickens each into four parts, wash them well and season with *salt and pepper*. Make a mixture of the lemon juice, the garlic, the oil and the spices, then smear each chicken part with this mixture, on both sides. Beat the yoghurt and salt it slightly, then place the chicken parts in an oven dish and pour over them the yoghurt. *Bake in a* preheated moderate oven until the chicken parts become golden crimson. Serve with french fries, sautéed vegetables and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Anyone for *bouri*?

Nigel Ryan goes fishing in Tewfiqiya

It would be easy to miss Asmak Port Said, in the heart of Tewfikiya. Flanked by vegetable and fruit stalls, the restaurant is an unostentatious affair — the plain interior is typical of this kind of popular restaurant where the emphasis is on food rather than frills. No nonsense, no linen tablecloths here in pastel shades, no napkins folded to resemble sailing boats. Instead, walls are tiled, tables are plain, water comes in stainless steel jugs and the salt is mixed with cumin in a finger bowl. One concession towards ambient decoration, however, came in the form of sea shells cunningly converted into rather dinky ashtrays. And the place is clean.

What of the food? Fish, of course. The waiter emerges with a tray of fish, clear-eyed and mournful, from which the customer chooses — we were offered *bouri* and *bolti* and *gambari*, all of which looked remarkably fresh. Maybe, on other days, the choice is more extensive since the criteria seems to be what is freshest on the market. After some discussion and a great deal of equivocation and dithering we plumped for grilled *bouri* — five, since they were far from enormous — and a kilo of *gambari*.

The fish is cooked on a large barbecue in the street in front of the shop. Clouds of smoke billow from the charcoal, wafted by one of those peculiar fans constructed from chicken feathers. Whilst the fish was grilling, salads were served — *tehina*, *salata baladi*, with onions, and *baladi* loaves. These were adequate. More than adequate, indeed excellent, were the home-made crisps, sprinkled with chilli powder, black pepper and salt.

Service is friendly without being ingratiating. You are left alone at your table when you want to be left alone and attended to when necessary. The fish took about 20 minutes to be grilled, arriving with the *gambari*. The grilled *bouri* were stuffed with a mixture of onion, garlic, parsley and fine slices of carrot, and served with halves of lemons. Though the skin of the fish had been blackened on the grill, the flesh remained firm, white and delicate. The *gambari*, deep-fried in a slightly unfortunate batter — a little too eggy, too much and too thick was the general consensus — were undoubtedly fresh, and the fact that the plate was clear at the end of the meal perhaps undermines such reservations.

If the menu is limited, so too the range of drinks on offer, which were limited to Pepsi or tea. Mineral water, perhaps a little surprisingly, was offered on request, and the bill, when it arrived — lunch for five — came to *LE125*.

Asmak Port Said is the kind of place where you go, eat and leave. Not that there is any pressure to do so, it is just what people do. There is seating for about 20 customers, and it is deservedly popular.

Asmak Port Said, Tewfiqiya, Downtown.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

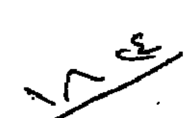
Across

1. Overlay; cape (4)
5. Russian collective enterprise of craftsmen (5)
10. Inclined plane; blow one's top (4)
14. Put an edge on; razor strap (4)
15. Brute in human shape (5)
16. Bones forming upper part of human pelvis (4)
17. Invigorating air; exhilarating influence (5)
19. Cozy corner (4)
20. Feathered vertebrate (4)
21. Study of punishment of crime (8)
22. Prepares the way for (5)
24. In full blood (4)
25. Fine material used for veils (5)
27. Light blow; blot (3)
30. Wrenched (8)
32. Similar to (2)
34. French summer (3)
35. Account of, abb. (2)
36. Thin as 6 o'clock; not roomy (6)
38. Frigid (4)
40. Female relative (5)
41. Old days (4)
42. Contend; propose (6)
44. Royal Society, abb. (2)
46. School activity, abb. 93)
47. Abbreviation of "shall" (2)
48. Assume; procreate (8)
51. Spike of corn (3)
52. Veal and venison (5)
53. Hawaiian species of goose (4)
55. Speak plaintively (5)
57. Shiftless; lazy (8)
61. Hardy cereal used as food, pl. (4)
62. Spotted cavy (4)
64. Hair-cutting implement (5)
65. Italian money, pl. (4)
66. Act emotionally (5)
68. Thick stemmed plant (4)
69. Trampled (4)
70. Prongs (5)
71. Late, jumbled (4)

Last week's solution

DOWN

1. Cut up; cuff (4)
2. Percolate; transude (4)
3. Presently (4)
4. Pavarotti (5)
5. Affirmative vote (2)
6. Forester (6)
7. Plural of "it" (4)
8. Dawn goddess (3)
9. Fate (3)
10. Indelicacy; immodesty (8)
11. In existence (5)
12. Bog (4)
13. Stuffs; cushions (4)
18. Miss Doolittle (5)
22. Adversary (8)
23. Request; appeal (4)
25. Symbol for "titanium" (2)
26. Discouraged; agitated (8)
27. Picture transferred and permanently fixed on china (5)
28. Ring-shaped coral reef enclosing lagoon (5)
29. Cry of stag at rutting time (4)
31. The white poplar (5)
32. Great artery (5)
33. Give one's word (5)
37. Riata (4)
39. Opposite of 11 down (8)
43. Capricorn (4)
45. Spanish gentleman (5)
49. Type of irritant gas used for riot-control (2)
50. Natural (6)
52. Parisian underground (5)
54. Make proud; gladden (5)
55. Secure; rush; nail (4)
56. Dugout (4)
57. Image; holy picture (4)
58. Mr Pound (4)
59. Christmas (4)
60. Allowance for extra weight (4)
62. Loved one (3)
63. French friend (3)
67. Weather directions (2)



Isis and the headless male

At long last, the site of the Alexandria lighthouse, off the coast where the Fort of Qait Bey now stands, has been excavated. The Royal Harbour, where Cleopatra's barge was once moored "like a burnish'd throne", is making headlines all over the world. But in the hubbub, writes Hala Halim, a name has been submerged: that of a man who undertook, single-handedly, the discovery of underwater vestiges of ancient Alexandria, and whose appeals for the recovery of a lost heritage fell on deaf ears

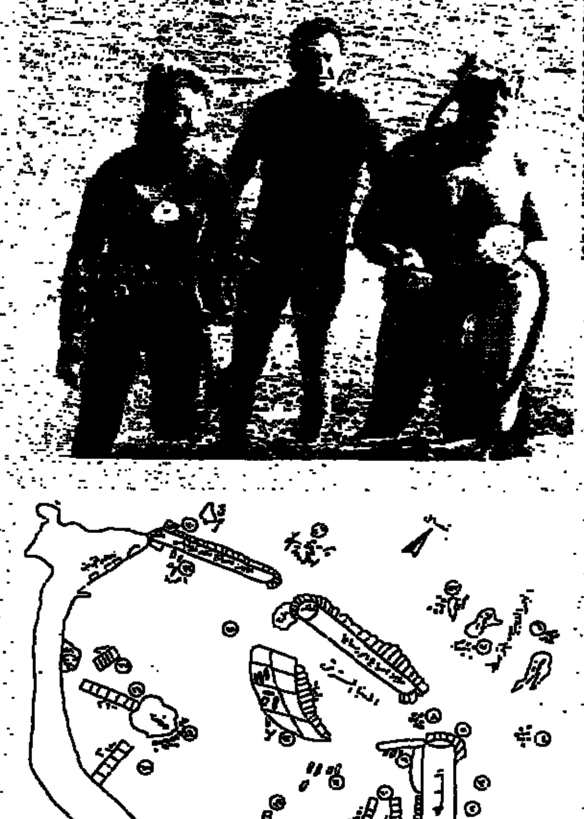
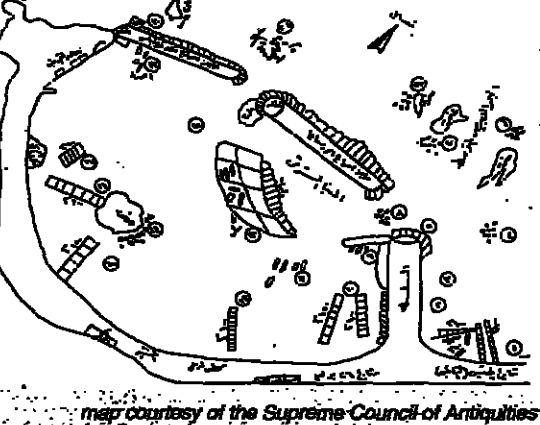


photo courtesy of Honor Frost



map courtesy of the Supreme Council of Antiquities



photo courtesy of Ezzat Sadeq

Clockwise from top left: Honor Frost, Vladimir Nesteroff and Kamel Abul-Saadat during the 1968 survey of the Pharos site; the diver mapping his finds; one of Abul-Saadat's maps of artefacts submerged in the Eastern Harbour

A man who spends half his life in the sea is not likely to leave many footprints in the sand. When the man *in question is Kamel* Abul-Saadat, it is only the spectacular beginning and the tragic ending of a lifetime devoted to exploring the underwater vestiges of ancient Alexandria *that are remembered*. His name is associated with the discovery and the raising, in 1962, of a colossal granite statue of a woman from the waters behind Qait Bey Fort. More vividly remembered are the allegations of murder that surrounded *his death in 1984* in Abu Qir Bay during the French-sponsored excavation of Napoleon's shipwrecks, sunk by Nelson in the Battle of the Nile.

But the life-line that stretched between these two poles was *in many respects singular*. To start with, Kamel Abul-Saadat's investigations of submerged Alexandria were a self-motivated, self-financed, single-handed endeavour. And, amateur though it was, this endeavour is all the more significant for having *taken place at a time when the authorities had* neither the equipment, the expertise, nor even the interest to deal with submarine archaeology.

Born in 1933 to Alexandrian parents, Abul-Saadat spent part of his childhood in Cairo, where his father *held a clerical post in parliament. When his parents* got divorced, Abul-Saadat moved back to Alexandria with his mother, who later remarried. He eventually dropped out of school before obtaining his high school certificate and started working with a *customs depot company in Alexandria harbour*. There he was to remain for the rest of his life — apart from a spell in the '50s when he worked in the south of the Sudan.

From very early on, Abul-Saadat's hobbies were *diving and spear-fishing, and it was out of these hob*bies that his passion for submerged antiquities developed. In a quote he delivered to more than one journalist, he says that it was while fishing in Silsileh in 1960 that he came across several amphorae *and potsherds that reminded* him of pieces he had seen at the Graeco-Roman Museum. "From that day, my friends would go fishing while I made for the seabed, which I searched from Ibrahimiya to Chatby, and if by chance I came across a fish, well I'd also *catch it*", *he said in an interview published in Al-Ahram* on 22 May 1961.

It is known that considerable portions of the Ptolemies' port capital have long lain on the seabed due to a series of earthquakes that toppled the city's *monuments*, as well as the phenomenon of land subsidence which affects coastal areas. Semi-disguised by algae and accretions, the appeal these ruins exercise on the imagination is further enhanced by their watery co-existence with debris from modern *times*. To the regular diver, there is also the thrill of what Abul-Saadat once described as the "game-of-hide-and-seek" aspect of underwater archaeological exploration. With the impact of *sea gales and waves*, artefacts once seen can be hidden, while new ones are uncovered. Abul-Saadat once saw the wreck of a ship carrying statues; after a storm, he never found it again.

In Alexandrian *homes where there* is a diver in the family, salt-encrusted amphorae and sherds of pottery are not uncommon. Few refrain from appropriating whatever portable pieces they find and fewer still go so far as to report their finds to the official antiquities *authorities*, as Abul-Sadaat did. This is not standard behaviour for a man who lived just above the poverty line. His spear-fishing equipment was hand-made, as his half-brother, *Ezzat Mohamed* Sadeq, explains; as for his diving equipment, he was *dependent on* discards from foreign acquaintances, a friend of his relates.

By May 1961, Abul-Saadat had identified two submerged sites and amassed *sufficient observations* on statues and masonry there to decide to alert the antiquities department. To the east of Silsileh — Cape Lochias in antiquity, site of the Ptolemaic royal *quarter* — he had found, among other things, "a staircase with eight steps, less than one metre wide, with marble columns scattered around it. The staircase led to what looked *like* a large *sarcophagus*. I also saw a life-size Roman statue of red *granite*. It was headless and lay on its side" (*Al-Ahram* of 22 May 1961). It was in Silsileh, too, that Abul-Saadat found a *gold coin* with a Latin inscription on one side and the face *of a* woman identified as "Penelope" on the other. To the north-east of Qait Bey Fort — the Pharos site where the lighthouse *and* the shrine of Isis Pharia once stood — he found two headless sphinxes, marble columns and a colossal female statue broken in two. Further on lay a jumbled heap of columns.

When in 1961 Abul-Saadat went to meet Dr Henry Riad, then *director* of the Graeco-Roman Museum, he took along *the* gold coin and several sherds of pottery with which he hoped to endorse his statements and his plea that something be done about these sites. The gold coin was initially *thought* to be Byzantine, but, given that the Graeco-Roman Museum had no numismatist at the time, the coin had to be delivered to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo — a task Abul-Saadat himself *undertook*. Finally, the coin was pronounced a fake, recalls Dr Youssef El-Gheriani, who later came to head the Graeco-Roman Museum. It is not known whether the possibility that the coin was an *ancient* fake was entertained, but Mrs Mary Morcos, a friend's wife, recounts that the piece was returned to him and that he traded it in for some decent diving equipment.

The colossal female statue, the so-called Isis which Abul-Saadat had found off Qait Bey Fort, was eventually raised in 1962. The *tardiness* and many other circumstances that surrounded the raising of the statue are an index of the socio-political context at the time. Granted, the antiquities organisation did not have any experts to undertake such a *survey* — navy *frogmen were called upon for the* task. But the question needs to be asked why the antiquities organisation lacked the motivation, at that stage, to call upon foreign expertise. Indeed, the *Progrès Egyptien* of 5 March 1962 reports that "the news *[of the discovery of the female statue]* was reported all over the world. An American expert in such matters, Peter Thorkmorten, currently in Greece, sent a detailed report on the subject to the concerned authorities, expressing his readiness to *help raise the submerged antiquities for* a thousand dollars per month. September and October passed, and the said antiquities are still lying on the seabed."

That nothing came out of Peter Thorkmorten's offer is not surprising. Under the straitened economical *conditions of 1960s* Egypt, *archaeology* — particularly underwater archaeology — ranked far below other concerns on the agenda of national priorities, an agenda which privileged military spending and industrialisation. Furthermore, in the years to come, from about '67 to the early '80s, much of Egypt's Mediterranean coast and in-shore waters were out of bounds for security and military reasons (in Alexandria, for example, Silsileh was to become a rocket base, Qait Bey Fort a military zone). All along the coast, diving was severely restricted for fear of enemy sabotage activities, particularly after '67 and during the War of Attrition.

If Abul-Sadaat had access to some sites, it was only as an individual and due to what his half-brother Ezzat Sadeq describes as "his excellent relations with the navy, which often requested his help." It is to be recalled, too, that if major ar*chaeological operations were to be undertaken in the* '60s, these were the salvage of Pharaonic monuments in Nubia and Upper Egypt, prior to the construction of the High Dam. Into this less than nurturing context, enter Abul-Saadat, an amateur with *no academic credentials, always going on about col*umns under the sea and constantly sending the antiquities department and the governor of Alexandria lengthy appeals for the salvage of the submerged artefacts. Not surprisingly, he was regarded as something of a little pest.

The actual raising of the so-called Isis statue, which is seven metres in length and weighs 25 tonnes, was a major operation that was effected over several weeks, due to the navy frogmen's lack of expertise in such matters. Sometime later, Abul-Saadat demanded of the antiquities organisation an honorarium for having discovered the statues of Isis and *the headless male. This presented a problem: how to* rate the monetary value of the two statues. After lengthy negotiations and a stream of inter-office memos, Abul-Saadat received the sum of LE125 (*see box*).

But if Abul-Saadat received little recognition from the antiquities department, he gradually drew a small group of supporters who understood his passion and saw the value of what he was doing. Each helped in a different way. There was Sami El-Dessouki, then *Al-Ahram*'s Alexandria correspondent, whose articles about the diver provided him with a mouthpiece for his campaigning. In return, Abul-Saadat gave El-Dessouki diving lessons, one of which, in the dangerous Abu Qir Bay, was interrupted by a solar eclipse. *The chumminess of Abul-Saadat and El-*Dessouki is palpable in the latter's articles, as seen in the coded references to a certain "Greek-owned taverna which is the only one in Alexandria to serve octopus... prepared with spices and red wine" (*Al-Ahram, 17 November 1972*).

And then there was the informed support Abul-Saadat received from Professor Selim Morcos, at the time teaching oceanography at Alexandria University, later to become senior UNESCO staff mem*ber at the Department of Marine Sciences. From* 1965, Morcos turned his attention to Alexandria's potential for underwater archaeology and has written extensively on the subject. A friendship developed between the two men, Morcos encouraging Abul-*Saadat to record his sightings and sketch objects he* had seen underwater.

Morcos provided Abul-Saadat with hydrographic maps and documentation on the Battle of the Nile, which later helped the diver identify one of Na*poleon's sunken vessels. In the sixties, with Mor*cos's encouragement, Abul-Saadat produced a series of approximate maps identifying locations of antiquities in the Eastern Harbour and around Silsileh. In the waters west of Silsileh, he had found what he describes as "a submerged pavement, part of it buried in the sand, which may be part of the Ptolemaic Royal Harbour". Interestingly, Abul-Saadat's suggestion was corroborated by the 1996 finds of the cartographic mission directed by Franck Goddio. What is also worth noting with respect to Abul-Saadat's maps of the Eastern Harbour is that large portions of the submerged antiquities he identified *have yet to be surveyed*.

In his capacity as an academic and a "name" in his field, Morcos, unlike Abul-Saadat, was in a position to contact key figures and institutions in an effort to draw attention to Alexandria's submerged an*tiquities. His efforts finally bore fruit when the head* of the Museums and Monuments Division at UNESCO responded by sponsoring, in co-operation with the Egyptian government, a survey mission by distinguished archaeological diver Honor Frost and *geologist Vladimir Nesteroff*.

Remarkably, this survey took place in 1968, only one year after the June defeat. But there were other extraordinary factors about the survey. Before coming to Egypt, Frost had not been informed about the exact nature of her task — let alone that it was the Pharos Lighthouse site that she was to survey — and so had packed only "a mask, fins and a wet suit". Her first two dives were without breathing apparatus as no compressor was to be found in Alexandria. But, with considerable resourcefulness, Frost overcame the technical problems. Meanwhile, on her second day at the site, Frost recounts: "I saw a man *with mask and fins sitting on the shore. He told me* (in French) that he knew the site well and offered to show me what was there. He was Kamel Abul-Saadat".

Once again, Abul-Saadat was there on his own initiative. The *man* who had discovered the site, was responsible for the raising of the statue, knew the changes in the area over the years and was indirectly responsible for Frost's presence, had not been called upon by the antiquities department to accompany the *UNESCO mission*. Assessing Abul-Saadat's contribution, Frost writes in a letter that, although "Kamel was neither academic nor highly educated", she "found... all [his] observations absolutely reliable", and describes him as "an amateur of the very *best kind*".

In her published report, Frost marshalled both the historical and the archaeological evidence linking the ancient lighthouse of Alexandria with the morphology of the site and submerged elements. Listing some 17 of the more important *pieces* of *statuary* and masonry, she writes that "such evidence would be multiplied a hundred-fold after a complete survey".

But this complete survey was not to take place un*til 1994, when the French-Egyptian mission, headed* by Professor Jean-Yves Empereur, started working on the Pharos site. In the interim, Abul-Saadat had roped in his Alexandrian Italian friend, film director Bruno Vailati, to film the site in 1980. Vailati's *team, however, did more than just film: they raised* from the site one of a number of huge granite blocks (50 to 75 tonnes in weight) which are now speculated to have formed part of the masonry of the lighthouse. Interestingly for such a huge block, *no-one seems to know where it currently resides*.

Among a number of hypotheses put forward by the French-Egyptian team currently working on the site, one is of relevance here. Initially, the colossal female statue raised in the early '60s was thought to represent Isis, a hypothesis *endorsed* by the iconography of the figure and by the fact that Pharos Island was also the site of the shrine of Isis Pharia, patroness of mariners. But given that this female statue was found beside one of a male, of the same proportions (which the French-Egyptian team raised from the site), it is now speculated that the two colossi represent a Ptolemaic royal couple in Pharaonic guise, explains Empereur who has always paid tribute to the work done by Abul-Saadat and Frost. "Among other things, we learnt from Honor and her map, which incorporated information given by Abul-Saadat, that the two colossal statues, that of Isis, and *that of Ptolemy-Pharaoh, were found side by side*", says Empereur, "hence the conclusion that these statues stood at the foot of the lighthouse in a sort of royal propaganda on the part of the Ptolemaic kings who wanted to associate their image with the most *famous monument of the city — the lighthouse*."

In 1973, Frost arranged for Abul-Saadat to give a talk on his Pharos discoveries in London at the congress of the Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subacquatiques (CMAS). To raise money for his ticket, Abul-Saadat sold his diving equipment to a friend, Captain Mohsen El-Gohari. When Abul-Saadat got to the airport, however, he found it closed: *it was the Sixth of October War*. But by the late '70s, things began to look up for Abul-Saadat. He had gained a measure of recognition, not least thanks to Frost's crediting of him in her 1975 report, published in the prestigious *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology. There were little thrills, too*, like an honorary membership of the exclusive Alexandria Yacht Club.

More importantly, one side-effect of late president Sadat's peace treaty with Israel was a gradual relaxing of the military grip on coastal areas. Thus, in 1979, Abul-Saadat accompanied divers from the California-based Mobius Group during their explorations of the Eastern Harbour. Drawing on the extra-sensory perceptions of mediums as well as side-scan sonar readings for their guidelines, the mission created a furore in scholarly Alexandrian circles. The group's quest appears to have been Alexander's tomb, a not uncommon obsession: in the '50s and '60s, a Greek waiter named Stellio often obstructed the traffic by *his random digs in search of Alexander. Although* Abul-Saadat could not resist joining the Mobius Group, according to his half-brother Ezzat Sadeq he did not believe that the team could find the Soma. In *Le Projet Alexandrie*, Stephan Shwartz, who led the *group, describes the Alexandrian diver thus*: "Saadat looked awesome, with his two-day beard, his silvery sunglasses, his thick arms and huge belly. But he was an amiable man who dived because, he said, it gave him a sense of 'freedom'... He was always the *first in the water and the last to come out, and could* hold his breath for an incredible length of time."

No account of Abul-Saadat's contribution would be complete without a mention of the work he did in Abu Qir Bay. Through a painstaking investigation of Abu Qir Bay, *and by interviewing local fishermen*, Abul-Saadat had in 1965 managed to identify the location of at least one of Napoleon's vessels, sunk by Nelson in 1798. This was Le Guerrier, together with other structures he thought were wrecks and also a *cannon. More appeals to the authorities were typed* up by Abul-Saadat, to no avail. In a letter dated 11 March 1969, Abul-Saadat told Frost that he had "found four 'Battle of the Nile' wrecks, including Napoleon's flagship L'Orient, which carried the silver Napoleon had sacked from the Maltese Cathedral," together with jewellery and coins. By 1972, Abul-Saadat had succeeded in obtaining sponsorship from *Al-Ahram* via his friend Sami El-Dessouki and help from a number of French divers from a company called Co-océan. He thus returned to Abu Qir Bay. It is not clear what work was done by this team apart from the fact that they lifted a coin.

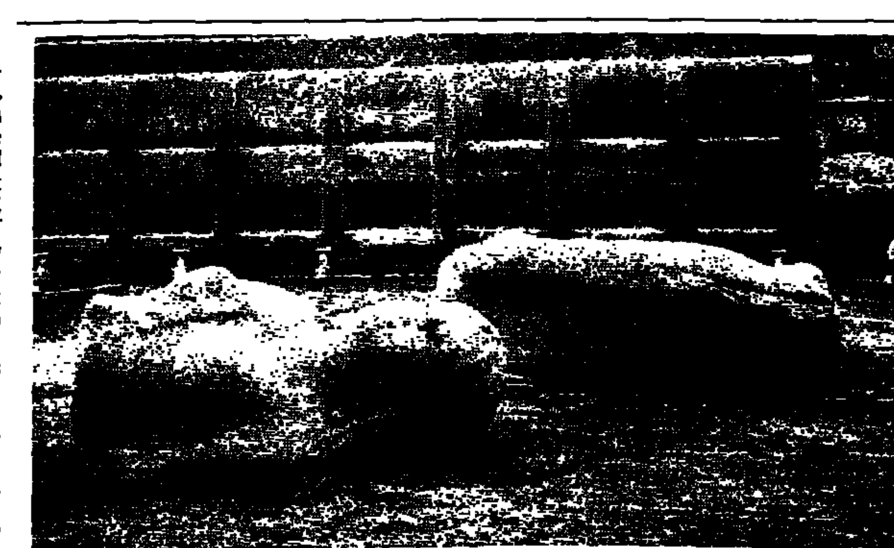
For a full survey of Napoleon's sunken vessels, Abul-Saadat was to wait until the early '80s, when the late French lawyer Jacques Dumas, at the time president of the CMAS, undertook the task. This time, the antiquities department officially called *upon Abul-Saadat to offer guidance to the French* team, which included Napoleon's great-nephew. Between '83 and '84, the team worked on the wrecks of L'Orient, Le Guerrier and L'Artemise. While the fabled Maltese treasure was not found, the team *produced a trove of the ephemera of daily life* — among them brandy bottles, coins, cutlery and crockery, and pieces from a lead type of Arabic and Latin letters, in addition to a number of cannons.

But Abul-Saadat was not to see the work com*pleted. He died in Abu Qir Bay in June* '84. At the time, newspapers and magazines such as *Al-Ahram, Rose El-Youssef, October* and *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* made allegations of foul play about Abul-Saadat's death. True, Abul-Saadat had the unmistakable aura of a tragic hero — noble but flawed (though in his case the flaw lay more in the moment he lived in) and thus unknowingly and ineluctably headed to*wards his own downfall. But the suspicions were not* totally unfounded.

Dumas had claimed that Abul-Saadat had died in the shower of the team's search ship. The doctor who was to write Abul-Saadat's death certificate, *however, announced that he had died of asphyxia*, that his body bore the marks of violence and one of his ankles was dislocated. The doctor recommended an autopsy. Meanwhile, Abul-Saadat's *half-brother* disclosed that the diver had spoken of pressures from the French divers to keep mum about some of the gold finds. Yet the forensic report concluded that Abul-*Saadat had died of a heart at*tack.

Although Abul-Saadat was officially delegated to work with the French team, he had not been *insured by the Egyptian* antiquities organisation; nor had he even been given a medical check-up. A lawsuit launched by Abul-Saadat's family de*manding that the Egyptian* authorities pay compensation for his death came to nothing.

At a recent "International Workshop on Submarine Ar*chaeology and Coastal* Management" held in Alexandria, Abul-Saadat was posthumously awarded a medal in recognition of his pioneering work — a thoroughly laudable gesture. At the Qait Bey Fort Museum, however, where artefacts brought out from Napoleon's sunken wrecks in the Abu Qir Bay are displayed, there is no mention of Abul-Saadat. This, *despite the fact that a sign on* the wall narrates the story of the excavation, going to great lengths in crediting all the authorities involved. Thirteen years after his death, it is indeed time that Abul-Saadat's singular achievement find its way into the official history of Alexandrian underwater archaeology.



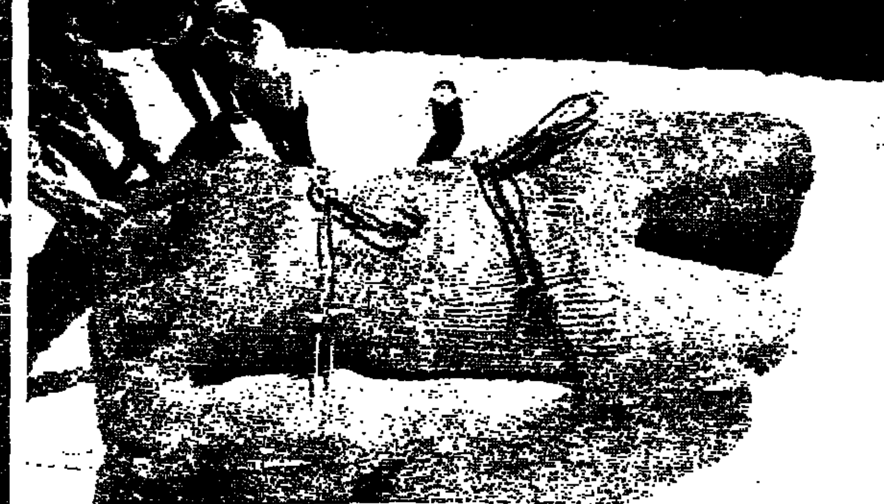


photo courtesy of the Centre d'Etudes Alexandrines

Saga of a statue: Whether Isis or a Ptolemaic queen in the guise of the goddess, the granite female figure weighs 25 tons and is 7 metres in length. *The raising of the statue in '62 by the navy* frogmen, took about a month, between tying up its two segments with metal chords and hauling them out. Finally, when the barge carrying the statue reached the navy docks in Ras El-Tin, it was left there during the weekend. Meanwhile, a storm caused the barge to capsise. The statue was to remain *underwater for six* months, after which it was left to sun on the navy docks for about a year.

Meanwhile, when the governor of Alexandria in the '60s, Hamdi Ashour, announced his intention to place statues in the centre of public squares, the antiquities organisation proposed the granite "Isis". But the suggestion did not meet with mu*nicipal approval. The lady — whose dress erosion* has all but obliterated — was not deemed fit to meet good citizens, Youssef El-Gheriani, former director of the Graeco-Roman Museum, recalls laughingly. Eventually, the decision was made to display it on the grounds of Pompey's Pillar from which it was moved to *the lawn of the Maritime Museum a few years ago (see photo)*.

When the late Alexandrian diver Kamel Abul-Saadat demanded remuneration for having discovered this and a headless Roman male statue raised from Silsileh Promontory the same year, it became incumbent on the antiquities organisation to rate the monetary and archaeological value of the two pieces, for which a committee was formed. The committee rated the "Isis" statue at LE700, "for overall, *its features are not clear, due to its* long submersion underwater", as the antiquities' report goes. As to the male Roman statue, it was estimated at LE50. Given the appraisal, Abul-Saadat's honorarium of LE125 was a princely sum.

As to the lady's male companion (*see photo*), he was raised from the Pharos *site* by a French-Egyptian *mission* in 1995. Word has it that he will be dispatched to France for an exhibition. Should this project come about, will the insurance demanded by the Egyptian authorities for his trip be merely today's equivalent of LE 700?

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



The Egyptian government approved in 1905 a project aimed at what it termed "settling the sands of Abbasiyya" on Cairo's eastern fringes. A concession was given to a prominent Egyptian, Boghos Nubar Pasha, and a Belgian businessman, Baron Empain, who established a company to implement the project. The plan was to build inexpensive houses for private residence and to link the new neighbourhood to Cairo with a tramway service. Such were the relatively modest beginnings of what is known today as Heliopolis, a sprawling and bustling part of Cairo that has all the markings of a ful-blown city. In this instalment of his *Diwan* series, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells how Heliopolis took root

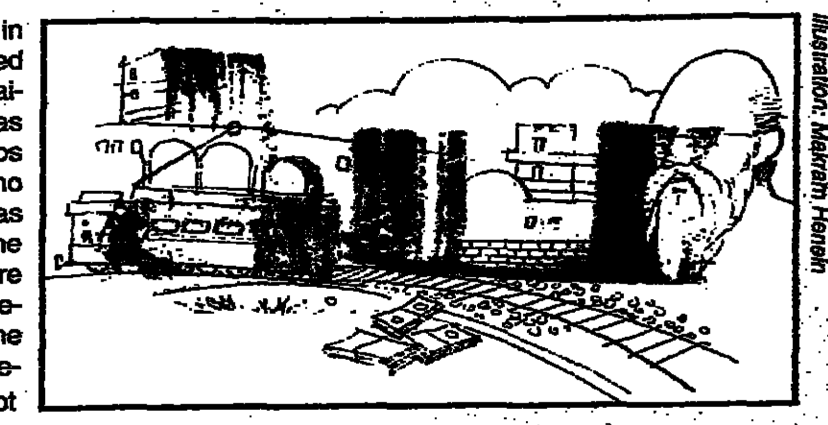


Illustration: Makram Henein

"The honourable Boghos Pasha Nubar and Monsieur Empain have concluded an agreement with the Egyptian government to extend a tramway line along Abbasiya Street to the area of Abbasiya." This news item blazoned by *Al-Ahram* on 13 June 1905 was but one link in the project covered by the newspaper intermittently over the previous year, a project referred to by the newspaper as "Settling the Sands of Abbasiya."

The article, occupying nearly half a page of this edition, details the conditions of the concession obtained by the two gentlemen for the development of a new suburb called Masr El-Gadida or Heliopolis. The concession covered 5,952 feddans of land. The cost per fedddan was LE1. According to the conditions of the concession, the two concessionaires, who purchased the delineated area in its entirety, granted the right to purchase an additional plot of land, twice the area of the first plot of land, that is to say 111,904 feddans, on the same terms and for the same purpose, on the condition that they first complete the construction of at least 100 apartment buildings in the first residential zone."

The first condition of the concession provided that the entrepreneurs had to use the area of land they purchased "for the construction of residential buildings, mosques, churches, hospitals, hotels, schools, playgrounds, and that no more than a sixth of the area shall be allocated to the construction of streets and the planting of trees."

Most of the other conditions of the agreement concerned the new tramway line. In this regard, Boghos Pasha and Monsieur Empain obtained a second concession for the construction of a tramway line extending from Kubri Limon to the end of Galal Pasha Street and another line from Kubri Limon to the new suburb. *Al-Ahram* wrote: "The duration of this concession shall be 70 years at the end of which the ownership of the two lines and all attendant property, facilities and equipment for their operation shall be transferred to the government."

One of the conditions may appear amusing to us today. According to this condition the government stipulated that the tramway lines could be used for "the transportation of passengers and their personal belongings such as furniture, crates and livestock. It is forbidden to transport commercial goods other than those which are necessary for the construction of buildings and fodder for the animals and livestock."

The company was also obligated to construct iron barriers along the railway and electric lighting. The concessionaires were also required to obtain the consent of the Egyptian Tramway Company for "extending the first line from Kubri Limon to Boulaq" and "to obtain the permission of landowners to construct the line across their property."

The tramways were to operate first and second class carriages. "One first class and one second class carriage shall be allocated for women and at least six trains will run per day in both directions." This project marked not only the beginning of the emergence of what has become today the extensive quarter of Masr El-Gadida, but, more importantly, the first sally into the urbanisation of the desert after countless centuries during which the Egyptian population had remained closely huddled upon the banks of the Nile. Nevertheless, it was a logical development in light of changes that affected the life of the Egyptian capital over the previous years.

By the turn of the century, both *Al-Ahram* and official government reports complained of the over-population of the area referred to as old Cairo. Although the city began to emerge from its medieval confines during the first half of the 19th century during the reign of Mohamed Ali, this expansion was initially very modest, consisting only of the construction of a road from the Citadel to Shubra Palace, the construction of a small military residential area in Abbassiya and the construction of a train station for the railroad linking Alexandria to Cairo.

The main burgeoning of new quarters began under Khedive Ismail (1863-1879) when this khedive decided to relocate his court from the Citadel to the area currently occupied by Abdin Palace. The construction of this palace necessitated the construction of an entire new quarter of residential and government buildings. Other new European-style quarters also came into being: the Ismailiya quarter located south of the road leading from Ezbekiya to Boulaq, the new royal palace in Zamalek, Qasr El-Nil Bridge, new streets lined with arcades such as Clot Bey Street, which extended from the central railway station to Ezbekiya, and Mohamed Ali Street which extended from Ataba to the Citadel.

A report, appearing in *Al-Ahram* in February 1904, gives a detailed survey of the capital. At that time, it covered eight million square metres, of which 1.4 million metres were paved with cobblestone and 1.39 million square metres were leveled dirt roads. There were half a million square metres of pavement, 99,000 square metres of gardens, 30,000 square metres of nurseries, 38,000 square metres of land devoted to the planting of trees. Fifteen bridges connected various parts of the city and its suburbs. There were more than 600,000 residential buildings which were divided into four classes in terms of their monthly rent — from LE6 for the highest class to only LE0.50 for the lowest class residence.

The most important development to affect the character of the city during that period was the increasing gap between its old, largely Egyptian-populated quarters and its new predominantly European quarters. The beginnings of the discrepancy was observed by the British writer Edward Dicey who wrote in an article published in *Al-Ahram* in 1898. "The oriental magnificence and elegance of the city have been completely effaced and supplanted by a town that resembles more a European city in terms of the harmony of its streets and the size of some of its larger buildings." Moreover, he continues, the layout of the city and its architecture has been so Europeanised that "should this continue, Cairo will be cleaved in two, one half, comprising the Ismailiya district and the adjacent quarters which are inhabited mostly by the British, elegant and clean containing no startling surprises for the tourist, and the other half, filthy, decrepit and over-crowded with buildings among which not a single old monument or tomb remains intact. This is the portion inhabited by Egyptians."

Al-Ahram was quick to seize upon Dicey's article and to accuse the British occupation authorities of promoting the separation of one part of the capital from the other and of "depriving the vast majority of its population of the right to benefit from the assets accrued from taxes on buildings and spending them instead on the quarter which they (the British) have chosen for themselves."

Evidently, little was done to address such complaints until about eight years later when *Al-Ahram* reports that the government finally decided "to send an investigating team to the native quarters in response to years of complaints and cries for help on the part of its inhabitants. The government noted that the city has become heavily overpopulated and that the new buildings that are constructed in the modern quarters are intended only for the rich who can afford to pay high rents whereas the poor can no longer find a roof over their heads."

Accordingly, the ministries of public works, interior and *awqaf* (religious endowments) made some attempt to improve conditions. The Ministry of Public Works approved a proposal submitted by a British company "to clean up the neighbourhood of Kom El-Sheikh Salama. The sheikhs of the alleys have agreed to cooperate fully with the planners so as to provide him with all the information they need." The Ministry of Interior moved to change the names of some streets in Cairo to reflect the city's historical legacy. The Ministry of *Awqaf*, meanwhile, adopted an ambitious project to renovate "all the buildings in the quarters, particularly those designated for residential purposes." The ministry also decided "to purchase some buildings in the vicinity of Al-Azhar University so as to convert them into student hostels."

These activities, however, were not in fact sufficient to appease the public whose appeals continued to appear on the pages of *Al-Ahram*. On 26 August 1904, the newspaper devoted its entire front page to a letter submitted by one of its readers entitled: "Cairo and how we live in it". The author writes: "On one's way to work, one encounters a foul wind which carries dust up one's nose and rims the eyes with dirt and one wends one's way around piles of noxious and repugnant filth. This is in the broad thoroughfares. If poor fortune brings one to a narrow alleyway, it would be advisable to bid adieu to all senses until they can be resumed in a more salubrious place and woe unto he who attempts to look and smell and hear."

"Tuberculosis and blindness and the Street Sweeping and Spraying Department" was the heading of another complaint submitted to *Al-Ahram* by a physician who wrote. "The dust that is raised around the street sweepers is saturated with numerous types of harmful microbes, particularly those which cause tuberculosis and opthalmia. It is my recommendation that those engaged in this occupation reverse the order of their tasks and begin cleaning the street by spraying it first and then sweeping it, at which point this government authority can change its name to the Street Spraying and Sweeping Department."

One complaint came from a reader in the countryside, aghast after his first visit to Cairo: "When I saw Ezbekiya and the surrounding area, I said to myself that this city is like a piece of heaven. I imagined that the whole city would be similar, but when I was obliged to call upon a friend in the old quarters, I discovered the familiar filth and squalor of the rural villages. On the surface, this is a city of light, beneath the surface lurks darkness."

Not that the inhabitants of the older quarters were complacent. The inhabitants of Dar Al-Gamamiz and Birkit Al-Fil continued to press their appeals for help "as so much filth has accumulated as to imperil their health."

The cries of these inhabitants became particularly desperate after rainstorms caused floods and destruction.

According to *Al-Ahram*, people in Cairo would be driven into greater despair if they attempted to compare their deplorable plight to conditions in Alexandria, "where the municipality and the representatives of the people devote considerable care to the sanitary conditions of their streets and alleyways which are all regularly and properly cleaned and well lit. As for Cairo, it is totally neglected and left to the accumulating piles of filth and rubble. Were the government to establish in Cairo a municipal council similar to that of Alexandria, it would relieve itself of many bitter complaints and alleviate the misfortunes of the people."

In the autumn of 1901, *Al-Ahram* launched an appeal to the other national newspapers to support its proposal for the establishment of a municipal council in Cairo. It also announced that it would distribute to its subscribers "a paper to be signed by all those who wish to form a municipality and then a committee to negotiate with the government for this purpose." The appeal was indeed taken up by other newspapers.

When the National Assembly voted down the proposal to establish a municipality for Cairo, it appeared that the urban foray into the desert would be the only solution for the city's ailments. In fact, even as popular pressure was mounting to establish a municipality, other newspapers heralded the project of Nubar Pasha and Monsieur Empain which they claimed would obviate the need for a municipal council. *Al-Ahram* scoffed: "Such a suggestion is purely a delusion because this project, in spite of its importance, will take several years to complete and it will not benefit the poor who will be unable to afford the costs of living there."

As time passed, however, *Al-Ahram* had no alternative but to let the subject of the municipality subside and to turn to covering the progress of the new project. The first development to draw its attention occurred in March 1905. Evidently, it had been Empain's initial intention to purchase from the government the Matariya tramway line. When his negotiations toward this end failed, however, he requested from the Ministry of Public Works "permission to construct a tramway line along Abbasi Street to Abbasiya."

Al-Ahram reveals that the first to object to this proposal was the Ministry of War which felt that it might jeopardise the eastern defence lines of the capital. The question was referred to the commander of the Egyptian army who, in turn, found no solid cause for objection on the grounds that the existing defence line could be redrawn. The government subsequently approved the project.

Initially, *Al-Ahram* readers were given to understand that the government had given its approval to a project that "will transform the sands of Abbasiya into a residential village with small housing units available at low costs and connected to the city by a tramway line. The apartment buildings will occupy 25 square kilometres of land. They will be modelled on Arab design and surrounded by extensive gardens. The rent for a single home will not exceed LE 50 per year and there will be only a few warehouses. The area will be intersected by many streets all electrically lit. As for the finances of this company, they are apportioned into shares and bonds priced at LE 20 and LE 25 respectively, with an interest of 4 per cent."

On 25 April 1905, under the headline "The oasis of Heliopolis and its development," *Al-Ahram* announced that the sale of shares into the new project had met with astounding success.

The board of directors and the general assembly of the company did not contain a single Egyptian. In spite of this and other matters that would provoke the Egyptian ire, the Ministry of Public Works gave the go-ahead to the project and the concession was approved on 13 June 1905.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Money & Business

Sale of US technology to China investigated

US FEDERAL authorities are questioning officials of an aircraft manufacturing corporation for the alleged selling of advanced technology to China, which the federal authorities believe may have been used for military purposes. Sources at the Pentagon believe that corporation officials might have known well in advance that China was going to use the technology in manufacturing missiles.

Non-farm payroll | Inflation | Dow Jones | GDP

New flats in new cities

THE GENERAL assembly of the Holding Company for Construction chaired by Dr Atef Obeid, public sector minister and minister of state for administrative development, has decided to begin constructing 10,000 housing units in the new cities as well as installing sewerage systems in 5 cities in northern Egypt. The general assembly gave a deadline of 20 months for finishing the construction.

Al-Ahram Egyptian Products Exhibition in Portugal

THE FIRST Al-Ahram Egyptian Products Exhibition will be held in Lisbon, Portugal from 5-13 July 1997. Mangi Ali Badr, head of the Egyptian Commercial Representation Office in Portugal, explained that an agreement was made with the Portuguese Exhibition Organisation to allow direct sales to the public during the time of the exhibition. The exhibition and its activities are being organised by Pyramids Advertising Agency under the supervision of the Egyptian International Exhibition and Marketing Authority, and sponsored by the Egyptian Embassy in Portugal.

Badr indicated that primary Egyptian exports to Portugal include petroleum products, fruits, juices, foodstuffs, chemical products, leather goods, aluminium and steel products, textiles, ready-made clothing, carpets, furniture, ceramic, and Khan Al-Khalili handicrafts.

Egyptian ambassador to Portugal, Mohamed Khairat Radi, explained that the market in Portugal is an open one, and as Portugal is an EU member, Egyptian products can easily find access to it. This can be realised through the Al-Ahram Products Exhibition in Portugal, he added.

For more information, contact 5786100/200/300, extension 2005 or 2254, fax 5785889. In Alexandria, please call 4834000.

Deadline for ticketing and visa requests is 1 June 1997.



Mohamed Khairat Radi — Mongi Ali Badr

Transport '97 in Munich, Germany

EVERY three years more than 30 thousand visitors meet at the largest exhibition in the world in the field of transportation, Transport.

Transport '97, the world's premier exhibition devoted to showcasing the latest means and equipment used in the transportation field, comes at a time when it is becoming more necessary for countries to provide or improve existing modes of transport, whether they involve land, air or sea transportation.

It is at Transport '97 that the latest developments along with practical solutions to problems within the field can be found. Transport '97 is your chance to acquire a broad perspective of the numerous and innovative products and services available in this field, discovering the most modern means of developing transportation systems appropriate to the market conditions.

The exhibition will feature companies specialised in land, air and sea transportation services for both passengers and cargo, along with companies specialised in station construction and cargo-loading and unloading equipment such as cranes. The latest forms of internal transportation for factories and organisations will be highlighted, along with means of economical transportation.

This exhibition provides visitors with an excellent opportunity to preview what's new in the field of transportation.

To facilitate visitors from Egypt, the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce offers a full range of services for those desiring to attend the exhibition, from entry tickets, airline tickets, hotel reservations and more. For further information, contact Noha Hasan or May Hussein at 3414023.

Faisal Bank finances 63 thousand projects

FAISAL Islamic Bank of Egypt is considered one of the banks taking an active part in the investment drive by boosting the production sector of the Egyptian economy. The bank does this through financing individual units within these sectors with the aim of providing them with their needs from materials, equipment, buildings and land.

The number of domestic investment operations financed by the bank at the end of the third quarter of 1415AH (8 February 1997) reached LE13.875 billion, with such vital sectors as agriculture, industry, pharmaceutical, medical equipment, and real estate receiving 65 per cent of such financing. Remaining financing went primarily towards financing commercial industries within the production sector.

Additionally, the bank established or held shares in 36 companies covering all spheres of economic activity, with capitals totaling LE1631 million. The bank's share in these capitals reached LE201.8 million.

Within Egypt, the bank owns or holds shares in 27 companies, which provide 8,500 job opportunities.

The bank's role does not merely end with holding shares or capital in companies, rather, the bank is keen to provide financing to companies, the total of which has reached over LE400 million.

Air France renovates its agency

AIR FRANCE celebrated, on 23 April, the renovation of its agency in Cairo. His Excellency Mr Jean-Marc de la Sablière, the French ambassador in Egypt, was present at this occasion as well as Mr Amin Atwa, counselor for the Ministry of Tourism; Mr Gérard Deloche, general director of Air France for Africa and the Middle East; Mr Franck Thiebaut, regional manager for the Middle East; Mr Michel Haddad, financial and administrative manager for the Near East and Mr Marc Emy, manager for Egypt and Sudan.

Air France has recently signed a partnership agreement with two major American carriers, Continental and Delta airlines. This agreement allows Air France passengers to access the American gateways unreached so far by the French company, such as Dallas, Atlanta and Cincinnati.





All is seconds in Al-Ahram handball

An expectant Egyptian national handball team had to settle for second at the Al-Ahram International Handball Tournament. Inas Mazhar reports

For the second year in a row, the Egyptian national handball team finished second in the 2nd Al-Ahram International Handball Tournament. By the closing of the competition, which was held between 25-27 April, Spain finished first, Algeria third and Norway edging up the rear with fourth.

Before a 10,000-strong fan base, the Egyptians earned their first victory of the competition, *defeating Norway 24-20* in the first day of play. Spain also began its road to victory by trouncing Algeria, 28-21 that same day.

Day two of the competition brought even fewer good tidings for Algeria, who fell to the Egyptian national team with a final score of 22-17. And, in an intense and gripping match, Spain squeezed past Norway, stuffing one final ball in the net to bring the match to a close with a 26-25 win.

The action in the Spain-Norway match, however, proved to be just a taste of what was to come. On the final day of competition, Algeria and Norway battled it out for third, with the Algerians slamming home a goal in the final 20 seconds of the match and pulling out ahead, 21-20.

But all eyes were on the much-anticipated Spain-Egypt match. For the Egyptian team, this was the most important game of the competition, representing a chance to test their skills against the Atlanta Olympics bronze medalists. Spain and Egypt are both set to compete in the upcoming World Handball Championships in Japan in May, and this tournament, in general, is viewed by the Egyptian team officials as the final bit of practice.

While Egypt led the match from the start, scoring goal after goal to the delight of throngs of cheering fans, the Spanish team succeeded in drawing the score and then one-upping Egypt by the end of the first half. It was still, however, anyone's game — a fact clearly evident by the level of play by both teams. But Spain, aided by Talaant Dujshebaev, one of the world's finest handballers, was a tough nut to crack. Despite their best efforts, Egypt was forced to settle for second after a 27-23 loss.

Al-Ahram Organisation Board Chairman, Ibrahim Nafie, took care of the honours, handing out the cups and medals to the various teams. Similarly, the five official sponsors of the tournament were passing out cups for best goalie, which went to Algeria's Hakim Tawfik; best player of the tournament, Marwan Ragab of Egypt; and top scorer, Spain's Dujshebaev. The Spanish team's star player was also awarded a trophy for best player in the world.



Ibrahim Nafie, Al-Ahram Organisation Board Chairman, handing the cup to Spain's captain *photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid*

Winners lose all

THE NATIONAL football team beat Namibia 3-2 in their second leg *match in the World Cup qualifications. But, as* **Abeer Anwar** reports, chances of an Egyptian side going to France next year remain slim.

After their disastrous defeat against Liberia, it was vital for the national team, led by new coach Mahmoud El-Gohari, to get back on their feet and do something to restore their dented confidence. The second leg of the World Cup qualification against Namibia was just the opportunity they needed.

But the Namibians were not going to go down without a fight. Having lost 1-7 on the first leg in Cairo, they were determined to take revenge. Eden Raften, their German coach, was in fighting spirit before the game. "Today will be a black day in the history of the Egyptian national team and a bright one for the Namibians," he declared. "The Egyptian team is an open book to me, and we'll teach them a lesson that they'll never forget." And Emmanuel Namaseb, head of the Namibian Football Federation, assured that "what happened in Cairo will never be repeated. The Namibian team has passed this hurdle and is ready to take revenge."

Both teams played a cautious, defensive first half, trying to outguess the other team, not daring to take risks. Namibia broke the ice in the 16th minute of the second half, scoring the first goal *from a penalty. But Egypt did not despair. The players reorganised* themselves and concentrated on getting the equaliser. This was achieved in the 38th minute from a penalty by Hadi Khashaba.

Egyptian spirits rose and Hossam Hassan found the net just four minutes later, in the 42th minute. Egyptian fans were in ecstasy for a full three minutes, until a 45th minute penalty allowed Namibia to level the scoreline to 2-2.

Egypt were not prepared to accept a draw and the pace continued unabated. Just a few minutes later Hossam Hassan scored again, with what was to be the last goal of the match, leaving a final score of 3-2 to Egypt.

Great though this game was, it didn't do very much for Egypt's fortunes in the World Cup. In the qualification table, Tunisia leads the second group with twelve points, Egypt is second with six, Liberia is third with four points and Namibia fourth with one. To make things worse, Tunisia had a home game in hand against Liberia. *They beat the Liberians 2-0.* Their victory was enough to ensure that Tunisia qualifies. So Egypt's only hope is that Namibia defeat Tunisia on their own home ground.

Ahli's women dunk Sporting

Ahli's women basketballers overcame Sporting to shoot their way to a well-deserved victory in the national league, reports Nashwa Abdel-Tawab

For the fourth year running, the final match in the women's basketball league pitched Ahli against Sporting. And, also for the fourth year running, the power and endurance of Ahli proved too much for the older and once supreme Sporting, *leaving Ahli* with a victory margin of around 20 points.

Ahli's young players, aged between 18 to 25, demonstrated a grit or dedication that has not always been present in Egyptian women's sport. Soha Fekri, *Ahli's and Egypt's playmaker, played* injured, knowing how vital her presence was to the team. Yasmine Ezzat and Rania Adel also ignored their injuries to play, and Rihan Taher and Amal Fayed finished the match despite sustaining wounds to their faces.

It was a tough, exciting game, with both sides putting up a good struggle. However, Sporting's hesitant play lost them lots of chances. Ahli, on the other hand, played some accurate long-range shots and made some good passes through the playmaker early in the game, *allowing Soha Fekri to shoot some* balls into the Sporting basket. This early lead was then maintained by solid defence, to give Ahli a first-half lead of 42-37.

In the second half, Ahli's Dalia Orabi scored 12 points, leaving Sporting without any hope of victory. Sporting attempted man-to-man coverage, but were clearly exhausted and jaded. Ahli responded to these tactics with a quick-fire game of rapid passing and interceptions.

With the prospect of defeat looming ever closer, Sporting resorted to deliberate rough play and continuous arguments with the referee. Ahli took advantage of the chaos to show off their skills for the remainder of the match, and at the final whistle the score stood at 87-66.

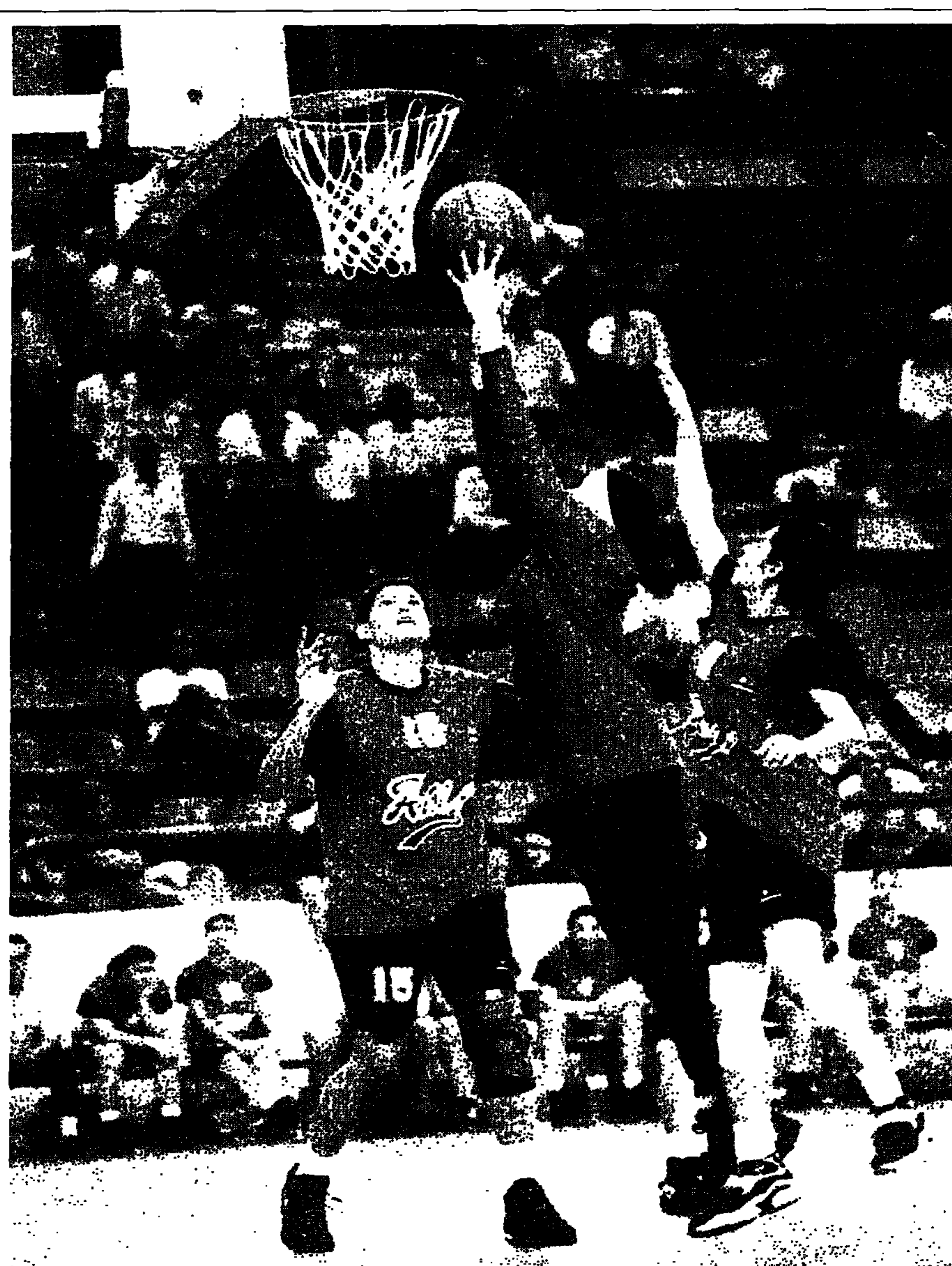
Ahli's Dalia Orabi, who scored a total of 36 points, was the undisputed star of the match, and Rania Adel, Rehab El-Ghannam and Soha Fakri also gave notable performances.

Overall, this was a game where the qualities of youth and speed were starkly pitched against those of age and experience. Sporting's senior players are now in their 30s. Their talent and skill are undisputed, but they lack the speed and energy of their younger opponents. The younger Sporting players lack the seniors' talent, and have yet to master the knack of teamwork.

Much of the credit for Ahli's good performance must go to coach Taha El-Ghannam, father of player Rehab El-Ghannam.

He accounted for his team's victory in terms of "certain advantages, namely youth, speed, physical fitness and some degree of experience — after all, Ahli have formed the basis of the national team for four years."

Teamwork is also a vital constituent of Ahli's success, and, by all accounts, El-Ghannam has played a great part in its development. With one daughter on the side, *he has determined that the whole team should* work like a family, and, with El-Ghannam as father figure, the team has bonded into a tight unit which is very hard to beat on court.



An Alexandrian attempt to break Ahli's defence — but in vain *photo: Salah Ibrahim*

Bowling boom

Bowling has become a popular new leisure activity. Is it just a craze, or does it have the potential to develop into an established sport, asks Eman Abdel-Moeti

Only two years ago, billiards was the craze in Cairo. Today, its position as the number one sporting social activity is being challenged by a new invasion — bowling. New bowling centres are springing up not only in Cairo, but over the whole country. The first one opened two years ago in Cairo's Bustan Centre, and now there are bowling alleys in Maadi, Mohandessin, on El-Nil Street and at Cairo Land. There are also centres in Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurghada, and one is soon to open in Alexandria.

The histories of the two sports in Egypt are rather different. While an Egyptian Billiards Federation had been in existence long before the sport caught on in a big way, bowling is completely new to Egypt, although Egyptians who have lived abroad, particularly in the Gulf countries, have played for many years. Now players and bowling centres are pushing hard to form a federation and host a world championship. "An official federation with international competitions, including the world championships, would be more than enough to promote bowling as a sport in Egypt," commented Amr Kamel, head of a leisure equipment company.

Because the same leisure companies are often involved in both sports, the two are often linked, although billiards is generally considered as a young people's game, while bowling tends to attract more families and adults. But will bowling die out just like any other craze, or is it popular enough to survive as a sport?

For some, cost is a problem. "A game of bowling is expensive compared to a game of billiards," said Ali Hassan, a billiards fan who recently took up bowling. A game of billiards or bowling takes from ten to 15 minutes, but I pay only LE8 for billiards compared to LE15 for bowling."

"Bowling is a new sport in Egypt and the Egyptians who play it are mostly those who have been playing it abroad," added Marwa Karim.

However, bowling centre manager Mohamed Fahim argued that his centre has a regular clientele of dedicated bowlers. "It's true that regular billiards players go bowling from time to time for a change, but it is also a fact that people who bowled before continue to come just for the bowling." Other centre managers agreed. "Bowlers are addicts; they don't want to play anything else," said one.

Hossam Diab, a 15-year-old bowling fan, said that while he still enjoys a game of billiards with his friends, he also liked the idea of a game that he could play with his parents.

On national holidays, bowling alleys are filled with both Egyptian families and foreigners. Amongst the foreigners, Filipinos and Americans come on top of the list of regular bowlers. *Filipino residents have taken to celebrating their* independence day at one centre, taking their children with them. And many American children like to go bowling with their friends to celebrate their birthdays.

The competition between centres is so great that they are continually coming up with new schemes to attract customers. For those new to the game there are simple ways to explain the rules, although ten-pin bowling, the only kind played in Egypt, is simple to understand. Almost all the centres offer a free game to anyone who scores 200 points. League tournaments are another way to attract new blood, even though it is the same few veterans who usually walk away with the trophy. Centres also offer annual or bi-annual membership which they find is a good way to attract regular customers, particularly families.

There is no doubt that bowling is booming. But only time will tell whether it remains a minority *interest* or becomes an Egyptian family favourite.



photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Mohamed Bahr:

Beyond the wate

It is a story as old as Nubia itself, except that now the old Nubia is no more

Since time immemorial Nubian men had left their harsh homeland and traveled northwards in search of greener pastures. Women were left behind to eke out an arduous existence. They held families together and kept Nubian culture alive. But after the deluge of a mighty dam, old ways changed forever. The land itself was no more.

Mohamed Bahr Abdel-Meguid was born in 1927 in old Nubia — in the village of Al-Allaqi in the Valley of Allaqah. "My mother was from a different village than my father's. Her village was called Abi. As a child, I used to divide my time equally between these two villages. I moved to [the Cairene suburb of] Abbasiya with my father and brothers when I was seven years old. But I returned to Nubia every two years to see my mother, aunts and sisters. I have very fond memories of old Nubia. Abi was surrounded by a stark and eerie wilderness. Old Nubia was a hard but very beautiful land. It was a timeless place," Bahr remembers.

The diminutive, affable old man shifts uneasily at his desk in his office at Ain Shams University whenever the subject of old Nubia crops up. He last saw his childhood home in 1962. His mother had died by then. He was in Nubia on summer vacation and he was then studying at the University of Manchester, England. He knew that it was the very last time he was to set eyes on his beloved old Nubia. His heart was in Nubia, but his mind was elsewhere — in England's universities.

Soon after Bahr's last visit to Nubia, Abi and Al-Allaqi were submerged in the waters of Lake Nasser. But Bahr does not regret the passing of old Nubia. "We, as Nubians, are proud that the sacrifice of our historic and ancient land was the cost Egypt had to pay to build the Aswan High Dam and bring electricity to the remotest villages of the country, provide potable water and irrigate new agricultural land," Bahr said. His hands are cupped gently around a folded map of old Nubia.

But was there no resentment and anger about the loss of the Nubians' ancestral lands at the time of the building of the Aswan High Dam? "I would not say there was anger, perhaps some apprehension, and some Nubians had misgivings about the loss of their land. But there was also hope. There was an unequivocal trust in the leadership of the 1952 Revolution. Nubians knew that that was the price they had to pay for the extension of modern services and amenities to their communities. Nubians banked on the government's commitment to build schools, clinics and hospitals in new Nubia."

Interestingly enough, Nubia is today the only part of the country where the literacy rate is 99 per cent — the national Egyptian literacy rate stands at 48 per cent. Illiteracy is as rare among Nubian women as it is among Nubian men.

"In Italy, where I recently attended an international conference, I was asked by a fellow participant, a distinguished American professor whose name I would rather not mention, whether Nubians were second-class citizens in Egypt. Frankly, I was outraged. If I am a second-class citizen, why am I representing my country at this conference? How did I become a professor of Hebrew and Arabic? How was I given government scholarships to pursue higher education abroad?" asks Bahr, outraged.

After graduating from Ain Shams University in 1955, Bahr won an Egyptian government scholarship to study Hebrew in Ireland at Trinity College, Dublin. After receiving his BA with honours from Trinity College in 1959, Bahr crossed the Irish Sea to further his Hebrew Studies in England at the University of Manchester, where he received his MA in 1963. Three years later, in 1966, Bahr obtained a PhD from Oxford University.

Bahr's doctoral thesis was about the Jewish Andalusian poet *Al-Harizi*, who composed the first Hebrew *maqamat* — a genre of Arabic rhymed prose. Bahr believes that ancient Hebrew was actually a dialect of ancient Arabic or proto-Arabic and should not be considered a separate language. "The Tablets of Moab, in the Jordanian Desert, have inscriptions that are very similar to ancient Arabic scripts. They were written soon after the ancient Hebrews left Egypt and settled in the Holy Land," Bahr says.

"There is a marked resemblance between the Hebrew and Arabic languages. There are especially close similarities in morphology, signification, and even sometimes in syntax. Historically, Hebrew Andalusian literature was considered a shadow of Arabic Andalusian literature. Hebrew metres were modeled on Arabic ones," Bahr said.

Bahr has authored several books, including *Judaism*, written in 1977; *Judaism in Arab Andalusia*; and *Between Arabic, Its Dialects and Hebrew*.

Bahr is an erudite man, but he speaks simply and passionately about his academic work. He makes extinct languages not only comprehensible but also relevant and interesting to the layperson. "The ancient Nubian language was written in the Greek script in a similar fashion to the Coptic language. The Nubians resisted Islamisation for a very long time — long after the vast majority of Egypt had become predominantly Muslim. But when, three centuries ago, Nubians were won over to Islam, they became among the most devout Muslims. The status of Nubian women was always rather different from that of their non-Nubian compatriots, however. Ancient Nubia, even in Christian times, was a matrilineal society. Descent and inheritance of office and rank always took place through the female line." Bahr sees a clear parallel between this tradition and Jewish belief: "The Jews, like the Nubians, are essentially matrilineal. A Jew is only a Jew if his mother is Jewish. A person is not considered Jewish if his father is Jewish but his mother is not."

There are also similarities, however, between the Ancient Egyptian and contemporary Nubian languages. "In both Ancient Egyptian languages and the Nubian languages, the word for temple is *berber*. *Berberi* (pl. *barabra*), originally meant architects or temple builders. Unfortunately, the word now has negative connotations. Originally, it conveyed the same meaning as the Egyptian colloquial, '*ya handasa*' — a flattering way of addressing a person. *Handasa* , like *berberi*, literally means engineer or architect, but actually refers to a capable or knowlegeable person, adept at his job."

Bahr grows more animated as he delves deeper into the intricacies of the explanation. The shabby office recedes and the splendours of ancient Nubia — Ancient Egypt — hover before the listener's enthralled eyes. "The prefix *ari* was used in Ancient Egypt and is used in modern Nubian to denote the plural. In both Nubian and Ancient Egyptian, *Nefertari* means "their beauty". Royal personalities were referred to in the plural in both Ancient Egypt and Nubia. But, we must bear in mind that there was no single Ancient Egyptian language. There were many different, some mutually unintelligible, dialects and languages in Ancient Egypt. And the languages of Ancient Egypt were in a process of constant evolution over the centuries. Classical Ancient Egypt lasted for some 4,000 years," Bahr explains.

Paradoxically, however, there is no such thing as a Nubian language. There are four Nubian languages today, two of which are spoken in Egypt and two in Sudan. The Nubian language spoken in the area around the Egyptian city of Aswan is called Matoke. Further south, towards the Egyptian-Sudanese border near Abu Simbel, the Faditcha language is widely spoken. In the extreme northern part of Sudan's Nile Valley and in the vicinity of Wadi Halfa, Nubians speak Mahas. Further south, around the riparian town of Dongola, Dongolawi is spoken. Ironically, the Nubian languages further north in Egypt and northern Sudan such as Matoke, Faditcha and Mahas contain relatively fewer Arabic words than the Nubian language furthest south — Dongolawi. "But all contemporary Nubian languages have borrowed extensively from Arabic, especially the vocabulary and religious terminology," Bahr says.

"But there are important differences between the Nubian languages and Arabic. For example, none of the Nubian languages have the guttural sounds so characteristic of Arabic. The syntax and grammar of the four Nubian languages are markedly different from Arabic. They are not Semitic languages like Hebrew and Arabic. Rather, the Nubian languages belong to the so-called Hamitic or Nilo-Saharan group of languages. Most historians agree that Ancient Egyptian languages were Hamitic and not Semitic," Bahr adds.

While he does not resent the submerging of Nubia, he does find it a pity that, today, Nubians have to go abroad to study the Nubian language and research Nubian history and civilisation. "There are no institutions of higher learning in Egypt today where students of Nubian languages and Nubian history and civilisation can work seriously on their specialisations. Students of Nubian studies have to go either to Sudan, where there is the Department of Nubian Studies and Meroetic Civilisation at Khartoum University, or to various European and American institutions of higher learning," Bahr says. Yet the space in which Nubia could have been kept alive is so restricted that Arabic has entered even Bahr's home. While he speaks his native Matoke at home, his own children "cannot converse easily in Matoke, but they do understand the language. If questioned about something in Matoke, they will answer in Arabic," he shrugs in exasperation.

"My wish is that we treasure the rich linguistic heritage we have inherited from our ancestors. We must treasure, at a national level, all the various languages and dialects of Egypt. A systematic compilation of these languages and dialects, and research into their unique vocabulary, syntax and grammar is essential. The study of contemporary languages and dialects will enrich our knowledge of our past. We can discover many things about the present and our contemporary identity from studying and researching our linguistic heritage. The Matoke and Faditcha languages are an important component of our national Egyptian heritage," Bahr says.

Bahr joined *Jamiyat Al-Turath*, the Heritage Society, founded by Professor Mahmoud El-Shurbagi in an attempt to salvage something of Nubia's ancient culture. Bahr was a very active member of the Society in the 1960s and 1970s, but since the death of his mentor, El-Shurbagi, he has taken a back seat when it comes to official work on Nubian cultural matters.

His convictions, however, remain alive. That they are backed by a solid foundation of academic research is to his credit. And the fact that the real Nubia is no more is perhaps compensated, to an extent, by the wealth of his knowledge. "The glories of Ancient Egypt and old Nubia are indistinguishable. The most impressive of Ancient Egypt's temples lie in the southern part of the country. Indeed, the greatest of all Ancient Egyptian temples — Abu Simbel — is actually located in the very heart of Nubia," Bahr chuckles.

Profile by **Gamal Nkrumah**